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The Gray House of the Quarries

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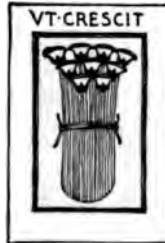
MARY HARRIOTT NORRIS

Author of

"Phebe," "John Applegate, Surgeon," "Lakewood:
a Story of To-Day," etc.

WITH AN ETCHING

By EDMUND H. GARRETT



LAMSON, WOLFFE AND COMPANY

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To
Sarah Elizabeth Jones

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AP '80





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PART FIRST. — SPRING



THE GRAY HOUSE OF THE QUARRIES

CHAPTER I

"SUSANNA! Susanna!"

The patter of running footsteps sounded lightly on the uncarpeted stairs.

"Here I am, grandma!"

An anxious query sharpened the spectacled eyes regarding the midget, who now stood looking far up towards a motherly chin lying in treble folds upon a capacious bosom.

"Where have you been?"

"Up garret. I found some great big books on a shelf — K-K-nickerbocker Magazines. I have been reading out of them about Dr. K-Knipperhausen."

"Well, well, never mind the reading, as long as you are safe! I was afraid you had fallen into the brook or down the ledges or something."

"O grandma!" and a laugh, with the music of the thrush in it, gurgled from her throat. "I do love you so, dear grandma," she added, with an amused, maternal accent, trying to clasp her arms around the old lady, her little hands clenching the long blue and white check apron, her curly head snuggling against unsuppressed proportions so voluminous that it was in danger of an eclipse. Suddenly she sprang away.

"Can I go back?"

"Half an hour — just half an hour! It is nearly dinner time."

"All right!" and away she fled — up a basement flight of dark, narrow stairs, out into a great square, windowy parlor, thence up a second box staircase; and behold

her in her beloved attic—the typical country attic of fifty years ago.

There was a window at either end, from which she had studied the views with the “long, long thoughts” of childhood; and to her awakening and active mind, the moods they induced were as varied as those suggested by New York and London to the imaginative child of to-day. The north window was the bedtime one, for near it stood a ponderous, disused loom converted into a bed. In this spacious enclosure of feathery softness she would sit alone, night after night, a diminutive, white-clad figure, alternately looking out of the window at the upward slope of an apple orchard, the tops of whose bunchy trees made green beds, to her fancy as comfortable as her own, or reading “Peep o’ Day,” or “Pilgrim’s Progress,” until the balmy sleep of an innocent, fearless heart overtook her, descending sweetly from the misty, darkening corners of the attic and the wide, wide world of the orchard. The south window just above the stairs was the daytime one. Here she would stand on tiptoe, her slender arms folded on the sill, her small body leaning far out, her steady gaze following the highway till it was lost in the distance, or climbing the steep bent of the fields to where they joined the forests sweeping to the Catskills. The south window caught the sunlight, alluring it in golden streaks across the bare floor.

As the sun rose higher, the attic odors concentrated. The spicy scent of the cedar shingles mingled with those of pennyroyal and catnip hanging from the heavy rafters dovetailed together and fastened with oak pins. Bunches of sage, swinging in the breeze, sifted a delicate blue-gray powder over the floor, suggestive to susceptible olfactory nerves of turkey dressing and roast sparerib. The wasps, exhilarated by the joys of heat and light, came out in swarms from their nests in the peaked roof and hummed in and out of that south window, belying their reputation to Susanna; for they never stung her, while their song and rhythmic movements fed her fancy. There was only one object in the attic to qualify her pleasure—a small, brass-studded hair trunk, containing various ancestral belongings. Once she had knelt beside it while it was opened; and, fixed in her memory forever after for the solemnities of reverie, was the regimental suit of a colonial major, and

the hat, bullet-pierced, of a captain in the Pequot War. She had held, in her own hands, belts and sashes, shoe buckles and snuff-boxes, the property of one of the early provincial governors, and these relics, in the impressionable child, awoke those uncanny sensations which haunt older persons when musing long upon the past.

But, usually, she did not think of the trunk far back under the eaves, and if there were unknown depths or boxes, or unexplored shelves, so much the better.

The Knickerbockers, this day, had proved a glorious find; the wonder was, that she had not discovered them earlier.

As she came bounding up the steps, she cast a satisfied look at the unpromising row of leathery volumes. They seemed to give meaning to the smile lurking about the mouth of a plaster bust of Henry Clay standing on the very end of the shelf and just above her head, as she sat down on the top step, under the breezy window, to continue the story of Dolph Heyliger.

One slender little leg was crossed over the other knee. The heavy book was laid flat open on her lap, her round head, with its shock of curly chestnut hair through which shone a glint of gold, was bent over the volume and her eager eyes followed the story, when —

“Skwie, skwie, skwie —”

Down went the book, face upward, and springing to her feet, she turned with a knowing smile to a small stove placed for the summer in the attic. Kneeling in front of it, and cautiously opening the door below the grate, she looked in. On a comfortable litter lay three new-born mice, white, hairless, and scrawny.

“O mousies, mousies, I’s e so glad to see you, I is,” — taking one little thing caressingly in her hand. “But you mustn’t cry, or grandma will find you, she will. You must keep quiet, and I will bring you some cheese and —”

“Skwie, skwie —”

“Sh!” putting the mouse reprovingly back and sticking her mouth close to the opening. “You’ll be drowneded, just as sure as you live, you will. Grandma is very good, the kindest, goodest grandma, but she doesn’t like wee mousies —”

“Susanna!”

"Grandma's calling me. I must go to dinner. Don't say another word and I'll bring you up something nice—I will—I will! Good by, good by!" With a skip and a jump, she bounded past the forgotten book, down the stairs, and into the big, sunny living-room.

At one end of it, opposite the door, the upper half of which swung open, revealing the view and admitting the locust-scented air, stood the table, offering one course of promiscuous plenty.

The other members of the family were already in their places, and she stole to her seat next her grandmother, quickly bobbing her head while grace was said in a voice tremulous with great age.

Fortunately for Susanna, the blessing was brief. Her eyes wandered with youthful yet critical hunger over the array of food. A pan of baked beans, from which a crisp end of pork showed, stood in front of Mrs. Dutton. Back of it were smoking dishes of potatoes and greens. A plate of hot biscuits and another of butter, dewy and yellow, were in the centre. At the lower end of the table, a rhubarb pie and some quince preserves completed a meal which the child's summarizing observation pronounced satisfactory.

"I wouldn't eat the pork, father. I boiled a couple of eggs for you," and Mrs. Dutton, taking the eggs from a covered bowl of hot water, handed them coaxingly to a venerable man who for form's sake presided at one end of the table.

Susanna noticed the veins meandering in indigo lines and the sinews standing up like whip-cords on the trembling hand extended for the eggs. Doubling her own little fist in her lap, she made a comparison; but there was no resemblance except a tentacular one, and presently forgetting everything but the merits of the feast, she proceeded to regale an appetite luxurious in its heterogeneous demands.

"Banma," said a balmy little voice, "if you want to know what to get for my brekfus to-morrow, you can give me some yeggs, too."

The old lady reared her head in benevolent astonishment.

It was Susanna's little sister Janey who spoke, a child with the ethereal languid beauty haunting to a motherly

heart. There was a fine, delicate pink bloom in her round cheeks; her small hands were plump; but something in the almost translucent whiteness of her skin, the large sweet seriousness of her gaze, and in the very look of the flaxen locks lying in heavy, irregular curls over her head, spoke of some unknown heavenly maturity.

"Would Janey like a yegg this minute?" inquired Mrs. Dutton, presently, as though a sub-conscious impulse compelled her to indulgence against her will.

A beaming, matronly smile invested Janey's small features with amusing dignity, while she answered most amiably, "Brekfus will do, banma."

"Does your dinner taste good, daughter?" and the old lady turned solicitously to the only remaining member of the family. "Do try and eat," she added, noticing the untouched plate. "You are going to get well. But you must eat! Drink your milk, Maggie, do, please do!"

"Don't worry about me, mother. I will take care of myself."

Janey looked up and stroked the thin cheek with her little hand.

"The beans is splendid, mamma," said Susanna, encouragingly, whose round body, in a plain waist of purple calico, looked stuffed.

"You and I will have to eat for the whole family, Susanna," said her grandmother.

The child laughed, holding out a firm hand for a generous piece of pie proffered her.

"Merciful," said the aged man, now for the first time acting as if conscious of his whereabouts, "the mice kept running up and down the walls of my room all night. Have you set the traps lately?"

Susanna stirred uneasily. A tremulous sentiment hovered about her mouth.

"No, father, I haven't. There does seem to be so much for one pair of hands to do! But I mean to, and I will. — Don't you think you could eat a piece of pie, Maggie?"

The invalid shook her head while trying to stop coughing long enough to answer, a smile like Janey's lighting up her large, sunken, hazel eyes.

"Well, if no one wants any more dinner, I'll set the

traps while I think of it. Come, Susanna, come and put the cheese on the hooks and take the traps up garret."

"I hasn't seen any mousies' tracks over the floor—oh, for ever so long!" she replied dramatically.

"They are shy, mice are. There's that stove; I expect, if I examined it, I should find it alive."

"Why don't you go up and see, Merciful?" inquired the old man.

"O grandma," and Susanna now laid repressive hands on Mrs. Merciful Dutton, "you'll fall down-stairs, if you go right after dinner."

Mrs. Dutton glanced at her with a gleam of suspicion. "I guess I'd better go," and she hurried into the cellar, opening off the living-room, Susanna reluctantly following.

"Put the traps in your apron, child."

"I'm afraid you'll fall, grandma," said the little girl, half-way up the first flight.

"You are too afraid, Susanna. I dare say you are nursing another colony of mice—are you?" and she turned around as they emerged from the dark staircase into the sunshine of the parlor.

"I haven't fed any little mousie a single thing—not since you drowned the last ones. I think it's wicked to drown mousies and cats, I do!" She stared reproachfully and solemnly at Mrs. Dutton.

"Ah, child, when you are as old as"—she hesitated. What right had she to cast the shadow of necessity, of the mute competition for a living forever going on between man and beast, across this sensitive, affectionate nature epitomizing the Merciful of sixty years ago? Instead, she continued, "You don't want the mice to keep your grandfather awake, do you?"

With the contradictoriness of childhood seeing itself at an advantage, Susanna replied, "He isn't my grandpa. My grandpa was big and strong."

"So he was, child, the finest, strongest man that ever lived—and he was taken!"

"I wish my great-grandfather was taken instead. Why wasn't he, grandma?"

"The Lord forgive us both," was all the reply vouchsafed.

The second flight of stairs was ascended with much heaving and puffing on Mrs. Dutton's part, and with the wiping away of a prophetic tear on Susanna's.

"Yes, just what I expected!" was the exclamation, as, side by side, a big white head and a little chestnut one were bent low before the stove. "It seems only yesterday that I had this to do."

"O grandma, couldn't you let them live? You must have drowned a hundred already. Grandma, I believe you have killed a thousand mousies, I do!" and Susanna began to cry.

"Get your book, your Knickerbocker, and don't watch me," said the old lady, in whom years and experience had failed to dry the springs of sympathy.

But this she refused to do, for, side by side with her humanity, there lurked in the nature of her healthy childhood an æsthetic curiosity closely akin to the enjoyment of suffering. The attic was a pleasanter place to play in because of the generations of mice that had filed before her. The chickens and turkeys she had helped eat had none the less flavor because she had stood by and wrung her hands when their heads were chopped off. Her kitten was more interesting because it was lame. Thus was she adjusting herself, even while weeping, to the ever-shifting conditions of gain and loss called life.

Following Mrs. Dutton down-stairs, she sauntered behind, intent on being a witness to the tragedy, but ready for other diversion.

It was a sweet, wide world into which they stepped from the gray house set close upon the highway. North and south, as far as the eye could reach, extended the road, dazzling white in the June sunshine, and showing various turns and bumps where it accommodated itself to the slaty nature of the soil. Not a dwelling was in sight, although near ones were possible, because of the undulating country. No vehicle of any description disturbed the air, vibrating with heat. Through the early mornings, indeed, the solitude was enlivened by teams laden with flagging going to the Hudson. Their return in the late afternoons, wagons and men powdered with the dust of the deeply cut roads, made a dial for the farmers and an opportunity for Susanna to spring, by the help of a ready hand, to the sheep-skin spread across

the middle of a heavy buckboard, bent low with its ever-recurring weight. On such a seat, her short legs dangling in emulous competition with the lank ones of Eben Van Tassel, in whose sunburnt hands the reins were held loosely while the weary horses fairly crept along, she stole many a ride as far as the farm boundary, and with her thoughts or speech busy with those distant quarries from which the slate was hauled. To her, there was but one business on earth that took men out into the great world, and that business was not the cutting of the huge stones from their virgin beds in the foot-hills of the mountains, nor their sale in far-away cities, but their transportation past her home, on, on, out of sight, to the splendid river which she only rarely saw.

Opposite the house, on the other side of the road, was a row of locusts, and on this brilliant day the delicate green beauty of their leaves shimmered amid clusters of white flowers with golden-brown heads swaying in the breeze and filling the air with a bee's paradise of scent.

Intent on discharging her responsibility, and with her observation effectually obscured by a sunbonnet, Mrs. Dutton crossed to a narrow grass-bordered path leading under the trees towards the creek. But Susanna, bare-headed, with eyes in every direction, at once discovered Peter Vroom kicking his way through the dust and advancing like Venus, in a cloud, although his circumambient atmosphere had rifts sufficient to at once disclose his identity.

Running to meet him, and ambitiously imitative, she started a rival swirl in motion as she came near.

"Come to the back of the house," said Peter; "I've got something," and he slapped his pocket knowingly.

She cast an uncertain look in the direction of the creek, for the mice were still tugging at her heart and her love of the spectacular. But Peter's offer containing the higher charm of the unknown, the dust-clouds joined company and the children disappeared.

"Let's climb up here," he said, suiting the action to the word and mounting the top rail of a worm-fence.

Susanna burst the buttons from her waist in the quickness of her ascent.

Peter sat in profound silence, his companion, meanwhile, feeding on her imagination. Finally, unable to

control herself longer, she gave him a thrust, exclaiming, "Tell me quick, or I'll go in the house."

"Hold on, hold on," said Peter, coolly, but fumbling in his pocket. "I promised to learn you to smoke, didn't I?"

"Yes," in tones of mingled terror and delight.

"And you promised me, honor fair, didn't you, you'd keep it from your grandma—didn't you?"

"Ye-es."

"Aw, well, if you're goin' to back down, I'll go home. You're nothin' but a gurl, anyway, and so you're a coward. I always knowed it, and now I see it."

"I isn't, Pete! I'll keep my word—but grandma—she says I reads me like a book, and so I have to tell her the truth when she asks. But she won't ask," added Susanna, gloriously. "Have you got the pipes?"

"I've got what's better," he replied, drawing from his pocket two pieces of dried grape vine which he proceeded to whittle into shape. "A man has to begin on grape vines. It would make him too sick to start off with a pipe."

"Of course!" she agreed, knowingly.

The cigars being finished, he struck a brimstone match on the fence; the fumes set her to coughing.

"Goosie!" he exclaimed.

She suppressed her choking, her eyes full of tears with the effort.

He handed her the lighted grape vine. "Draw your breath 'way in, but don't swallow, or you'll choke agin. See me!"

He sat with his shoulders hunched into his neck, his chin up, and with his freckled face and short nose made a picture of pugnacious comfort.

"I can do that! See me, now!"

And do it she did, so superlatively well that Peter, jealous of his art, cried, "Aw, you! You've ben a-cheatin', you have! Who learned you to smoke afore me? Hev you let Nick Storm learn you?"

"No, Pete, I hasn't learned from anybody but you."

"This ain't the first time you've smoked, Susanna Kildare, this ain't!"

"Yes, it is, Pete—it is! Perhaps I couldn't smoke as well again."

"Well, I'll try you. If you do, I'll know you've cheated."

She began a second time, and lo and behold! the smoke wouldn't draw well.

"Never mind," now said Peter, encouragingly. "See me!" He puffed out his cheeks, he swelled his little chest, he sent rings of smoke one after the other—and meanwhile her grape vine had gone out.

"It's beautiful, Pete, beautiful! Who learned you?"

"Oh, I learned myself, I did! Try again, now, Susanna."

Her pride having been wounded, she refused. But she kept praising him, and when a softness crept into his cold eyes, she smiled in a motherly way.

"Susanna!"

"It's grandma. I must go."

"Don't you tell!" warned Peter.

She shook her curly head, scrambled backward down the fence, and, running through the thicket of locusts which had screened them from view, disappeared.

CHAPTER II

THE Duttons' neighbors, the Storms, were early astir the next morning. They were a thrifty Dutch family, going to bed at twilight in the summer, in order to be ready for ~~the~~ beginning at three o'clock.

Beautiful dark red cows, with shadings of black about the fetlocks, back, and ears, were in the barnyard waiting to be milked. Streaked ones like those of Jacob's successful breeding afforded a suggestion of circus gayety. Broad-hipped, full-breasted, benignant-eyed brown ones stood chewing the cud and flicking off the flies, and two straight-back, plump ones, of a breed new to the region, and so the favorites, were already being relieved of their rich burden.

The chime of the creamy spurts against the sides of the brightly scoured pails was music to Saskia and Nicholas Storm, who, in order to obtain a better grasp of the udders, sat well tipped forward and half-astride of their low stools.

The sun had not yet risen, but the east was gorgeous with pink and golden white pennons. The tall hickories in front of the homestead rustled in the fresh breeze, and from the meadow near by ascended a grassy perfume.

Saskia was a girl with a melon-shaped face, a thin nose flaring outward at the point, and prominent, yellowish-green eyes streaked like gooseberries. Her light brown hair, parted in the middle, was plaited into numerous little braids, pinned in a broad wad at the back of her head. She had a long flat chest, over which a calico gown seemed to be rivalling the skin in tightness. Her countenance wore a clear, determined look with something of the primitive, pastoral simplicity and straightforwardness characteristic of the late Byzantine madonnas. As her fingers squeezed and relaxed the udders, there was a play

of bone and muscle in her wiry arms, bare to the elbows, not unpleasant to a lover of physical strength.

"I'm afraid you ain't milked the strippin's thorough from thet cow, Nick," she said, as the boy tipped his stool straight and gave the animal a pat which made it undulate with an easy, contented gait to one side. "The cream's in the strippin's, an' the butter's in the cream, an' the money's in the butter."

"Try her yourself, an' see," he said, sitting down in front of another cow. "Hist, Cush." The patient creature set her foot farther back, and the rhythmical, alternating thud began anew.

"Thar ain't eny smoke a-comin' out o' the Dutton chimbley yet," and Nicholas Storm's pale blue eyes squinted in the effort to see. "I'd like to know the feelin' o' sleep at four o'clock of a summer mornin'."

"It'd be a lazy feelin' in a strong boy like you. Ef the Duttons'd ben early risers, they might a ben more forehanded. Shō, Cush, sho-o!" and Saskia soothingly patted the nervous cow she had just begun to milk. "Thar's the loom. What use doos they make o' thet? Turned inter a bed! An' thar's the quarries—two on 'em—es fine es eny in these parts—an lef' jes' es Mr. Kildare lef' 'em when he died. An' thar's the butter," she added, with a climax in her tone, "et up es fast es it's made!"

"Woll," replied Nicholas, in an indolent, meditative way, "thar's somethin' in ther fashin o' livin' thet there ain't in ourn. Ef I go inter the Dutton house on a rainy day, I jes' feel es if the sun wus a-shinin'. It gives me a good kind of a warm feelin'."

"As we're on the aidge o' summer, I'd advise you to stay away till frost," and she gave him a look half of contempt, half of amusement. "Here, let me hev thet cow! I can't trust you fer the last end o' the milkin'. Ef I warn't here to watch you, we'd come out'n the little end o' the horn on market days. I've set my heart on carryin' thirty pound o' butter to town ev'ry week this summer."

"You do your work, an' I'll do mine," said Nicholas, resolutely. "This cow's milked clean dry, an' I don't need you to tell me so." There was neither anger nor vexation in his tone.

"Two blickies of es fine milk es you'd see anywhere,

ain't they?" said Saskia, pacifically, glancing at the result of his efforts as she went to her last cow.

He threw his head slightly back as if needing no assurance of the virtue of his labor, and presently they were milking in unison.

"There!" The young woman rose, stretched out her arms, and then, stooping, lifted a heavy pail in either hand, and started to the milk-house, a low stone room built over a running brook.

When she had turned the corner of the barn, a sudden gentleness suffused Nicholas' face. He put his hand over his brow and peered in the direction of the Dutton house. The smoke was rising from the chimney now. He uttered a short sigh, half of longing, half of relief, and, picking up his pails, followed Saskia to the milk-house.

Meanwhile, there was a kind of needless, but cheerful, bustle going on in the kitchen, where Mrs. Storm was preparing breakfast. The smoke and savory odor of ham frying filled the room one moment, while the breeze, the next second, swept them through the windows open at both ends of the room. At such intervals there came a pervasive smell from the table, suggestive to the uninitiated of unutterable disintegration, but more fragrant than flowers to the sturdy, native knickerbocker. It was the perfume of a home-made cheese in a high state of ferment. To Nicholas and Saskia, returning from the dairy, these odors of ham and cheese, mingled with the heavier one of rye-bread, opened vistas of Epicurean enjoyment.

The breakfast table set out in the middle of the great kitchen, the floor of which was now banded with sunshine, might have provoked to hunger more fastidious appetites. The cloth, spun of domestic flax, hung in thick, well-ironed folds over the sides. On that June morning, when the sun was early kindling the air with fervent heat, the Delft ware of bluest white enamel and darkest blue looked cool, and to an imaginative observer, its mandarins and pagodas, its saints and sinners, might have seemed more edifying than journeys to the Orient and long family prayers.

As Nicholas stepped across the threshold, it was to hear his father renew a theme of never-failing importance to Saskia.

●

"They ain't our kind. They don't improve the property and they won't sell. An' their ways an' habits are furrin and calkilated to make wimmin uneasy and fussy."

"I never spected to see Maggie alive till now," replied Mrs. Storm, irrelevantly, in a sympathetic voice. "March is sech a month fer people to go off in. It seemed as if them winds, this spring, would blow the breath out of her body. I knowed all the time she was short-lived, when folks wus a-sayin' what a purty complexion an' what shinin' eyes. Too much beauty's wuser'n eny. Here, Nicholas, here's your breakfas'," placing before him a big plate filled with food and a glass of her own brew of beer.

He was a tall, awkward fellow, but with a kind of native dignity. He nodded, and an affectionate glance shot between them as he pulled out the tall, brown, wooden chair, and sat down astride of it, the sole of each heavy shoe visible as he rested his weight on his toes.

"Eat es fast es you kin, my son. We must git before-hand with the work. It's goin' to be a pipin' day. What's thet you wus a-sayin' to Saskia about the Duttons, faather?"

"I wus a-sayin' I begrudged 'em thet plateau 'cross the road from ther house. It's an uncommon sitiuation. Ef I hed it, the fust thing I'd do, I'd cut down thet 'ere row of locuses; then, 'sted o' lettin' half the ground run to grass, I'd plant the hull plot with garden truck. It's a nateral medder, with a good, deep, black soil,—an' with thet 'ere creek jes' at the fut o' it, no drouth c'd dry it up."

"It's my opinion, faather, you'll git it," said Saskia. "Whenever I go across to see how Mrs. Kildare is, I keep an eye open, an' I know, plentiful es they all aire with welcome, they're hard pushed. They don't pertend to sell enything. They ain't sent a pound o' butter to market sence November. They ain't got no poultry to speak of. They ain't a-farmin' 'cept in a hand-to-mouth way. An' if ther ain't no money a-comin' in, they've got to go to the wall."

"How do you know they ain't got no money a-comin' in?" asked Nicholas, resentfully, turning in his chair to Saskia, who was patting and shaking the pillows she was

about to pile on a high bed standing in a recess of the living-room.

"How do I know?" and she laughed with a derisive little chuckle. "I see it fer one thing, and Mrs. Kildare lets it out fer another. I jes' has to say to her, 'What aire you a-goin' to git fer S'anna this season?' an' then, poor, fond thing! she'll sigh an' say, 'Nothin', I'm 'fraid.' An' then I'll say, 'Aire you a-takin' much med'cin now?' an' she will shake her head in a 'polagetic way with tears in her eyes an' tell me she thinks sick folk is better off widout it. An' then Mrs. Dutton, she'll be sure to break in an' say, 'You're to hev all you need, Maggie, long es you live, ef it takes the hull farm to tek care of you!' — I know!" and Saskia smiled grimly, balancing the last pillow on the bolster.

"You do, do you!" said Mr. Storm, with a heavy laugh, slapping her on the shoulder, approvingly, as he passed her to put his pipe on the shelf above the stove. "I tell you what I'll do, Saskia; ef I git thet strip o' land 'cross the road from the Dutton house, I'll put twenty dollars in the bank to your name the very day the bargain's sealed, — I will!"

"We've got 'nough land," said Nicholas, rising from the table and pushing his heavy chair out with a scraping noise.

"No, we ain't. A man's never got 'nough land!" roared the farmer, wrathfully. "I want the hull place, fer thet matter, with thet stream a-waterin' it from one end to t'other. There ain't a spot like it anywhar 'round — layin' on both sides o' the turnpike es it doos, an' them two quarries so handy fer workin' an' loadin' the flaggin'."

"Well, faather, you know they'd ben glad 'nough to hev you go shares with the quarries, ef you'd ben willin' to make a reg'lar bargain. It doos seem as ef they've got a right to run their place to suit theirselves, now, doosn't it?" and Mrs. Storm looked appealingly at her husband.

"A wumman's got no rights at all thet's wuth respectin', 'cordin' to my notion," and the old man sat erect in his armchair. "A man kin give her all he wants to. Thet's another thing. A man's wumminkind b'longs to him. Wimmin wus made fer men out'n Adam's side. They never wus hull human bein's. The domine made thet clear last Sunday. They's nothin' but ribs, wimmin is.

Ef they wus all like my gal," and he measured Saskia's long, sinewy lines admiringly, "a man'd never be out'n pocket hevin' wimmin 'round. Saskia's a-growin' into a wumman thet'll work for a man night an' day, an' give him his pleasure widout no fussin'. D'you t'ink, gal, you'll git thet twenty dollars?—do you?" throwing her a look of bragging pride and condescension.

A laugh, too mellow to come from such a thin throat, was Saskia's answer as she began removing from the table the wooden chairs with their high fan-like backs of many spokes, placing them with the others in a long row back to seat against one side of the room, and reducing the kitchen to a hard, comfortless order. Mrs. Storm went out on the stoop, pausing as if the radiance of the morning, the majestic line of the mountains, and the cool rustle of the hickories awoke a sense of peaceful leisure. Nicholas followed her, and as they stood side by side, there was a subtle resemblance in feature and expression.

"When faather gits to speakin' bitter 'bout the Duttons, it wilts me wusser'n September heat, Nick. I don't want to call him graspin',—he's always given me 'nough to eat and wear,—but it makes me feel oneasy to hev him a-reachin' an' a-reachin' after more. I've never felt right 'bout the foreclosin' of thet mortgage on the lower farm jes' when Mr. Kildare wus a-dyin',—es you might say. It sp'ilt the prupperty, givin' faather all the improvements,—an' how kin a old wumman an' a sick one do much with what's left? Pine trees an' swamps an' ledges an' quarries may be good 'nough fer men to tackle, but they's always lef' to the last, I notice. An' then see what a funny kind o' a fambly they is, all 'round. Thar's thet ole man o' ninety odd, gentleman born, an' furrin to our Dutch ways et that. An' then ther's the widder Dutton,—an' Maggie, another widder, a-dyin' o' consumption. An' there's Janey—es pritty es a wild rose an' es airy to fade,—what's left?—only S'anna! S'anna'll be stick-stark alone in the world long before she's a wumman."

"You don't think Susanna'll die, do you, mother?"

There was an intensity in his tone which made her look around.

"No, I don't think S'anna'll die. She's es sturdy es them hick'ries. She's like her gret-grandfaather. But, Nick," and she laid a heavy, muscular hand on her son's

shoulder, "don't you be a-harborin' foolish notions 'bout S'anna. She's a leetle gal, in the fust place, an' you'll be settlin' by the time you're twenty. It's the way with my fambly, an' it's the way with your faather's: S'anna'd never look at you when the time come, an' faather'd never let you marry a gal widout a big farm in good order."

"I'll marry the gal I want, or none at all," replied Nicholas. "I warn't thinkin' o' marryin', though; I wus—I wus only thinkin' how unnateral it'd seem with leetle Susanna nowhar around—like it seemed thet summer there warn't no robins."

"Woll, I always hed a hankerin' after the child, too. She hes confidin' ways, an yit—how sassy she kin be! It beats all what a tongue she hes. It winnows an' threshes till thar's nothin' left in an idee. Why! thar she comes, now! Ef she wants me, tell her I'm in the cellar." With the incipient halt of stiffening age, she poised a second at the top of the stone steps leading to the deep, cool cellar under the house; there was a blinking smile on her broad, high-featured face. The spirit of hurry had overtaken her, on foreseeing an interruption; but she knew, also, that while her work of inspection proceeded, Susanna would soon be at her side with a child's delicious expectation of being offered something to eat.

"Hello!" cried Nicholas, a dog-like fondness in his look and manner.

"Hello!" replied Susanna, daintily, and hunching her little shoulders as she tripped in the grass, and seemed about to drop a small basket she was carrying.

"It's sompin awful nice," she said, temptingly, holding the basket coaxingly near.

"Lemme see."

"No, you can't see! Only your mother can see, first. Where is she?" pretending to look everywhere, but there was an involuntary halt in her roaming gaze as it reached the cellar steps.

"Down thar," and Nicholas indicated the direction with a toss of his head.

"It's awful nice," continued Susanna, walking backward.

"Aw, now, you're jokin'."

"No, I isn't. You can have some, too," she said,

smacking her lips, as she turned a last time on the cellar steps. "Mrs. Storm!" and her voice had the high, sweet note of a bird's, in the upward lilt of its call.

"I'm here, S'anna," and, in its turn, the aging contralto was sweet to hear.

"My grandma has sent you these," uncovering the basket with innocent vanity.

"My, my!" and Mrs. Storm made eyes unnaturally large to meet the child's idea of appreciation. "How rich they look! Your grandma must a mixed 'em with cream an' butter."

"She did!" cried Susanna, triumphantly. "I seed her do it, and she said you must eat them hot, with lots of maple sugar on them."

"I don't know 'bout sech luxuries for poor folks like us."

"We're jes' as poor!" said Susanna, encouragingly, anxious not to be outdone. "So you needn't mind, an' you must eat them hot. They're jes' out of the oven. You must give Nick some."

Nicholas, who was behind her by this time, laid his big, bony, freckled hand caressingly on her shoulder. "Mother never leaves me out!" and again there was the responsive glance showing, not merely flesh of one flesh, but soul of one soul.

Susanna now walked about the cellar with an air of cursory examination. Both mother and son stood eating a biscuit and watching her in an expectant manner.

"I guess I must go," she said uncertainly and wistfully, but she lingered.

"Hasn't the run down here made you hungry? I bet you run the hull way," said Nicholas.

"I did," she replied, with a martyr's air. She was wheeling around on one foot.

"Do you see anythin' here you want, my dear?" and Mrs. Storm caught the child to her breast with impulsive avidity.

"Yes, I does, but grandma made me promise not to ask for anything. She said we mustn't always be 'ceivers from you, but givers, too."

"Woll, you tell her that you wus a leetle lady, an' didn't ask, but thet I jes' made you eat 'nough to stay your stomic," and she began cutting a monstrous slice

out of a rhubarb pie. It was true it had not the rich succulency of the Dutton pastry; but what cared Susanna for that? To her, it was a magnificent dainty and a renewal of the bond of friendship between herself and the Storms.

"Good by," she cried, her mouth full of the last bite and dancing her way to the steps. "Good by," she cried again, when she reached the landing, where she hovered, looking down, a bit of merry, happy humanity etched against the blue sky like a vision of love to the old heart below.

Everything about the Storm place was ravishingly fascinating to her. The great Dutch kitchen, lately enriched by a cooking stove, the first one introduced into those regions, filled her with awe. The twelve fan-back chairs, standing so sedately against the wall, represented the acme of numerous plenty. The rat-tailed silver spoons gave all things eaten from them a delicious, unsurpassable flavor. The high clock, with its arrogant tick, was a much more complex affair than her grandmother's, with its weights hanging naked against the wall and no crazy moon in its face to bespeak the changes taking place in the yellower one up in the sky. And then the Dutch bed in the corner, so puffy and high that once, when she had taken a nap on it, it had to be reached by a pair of steps; there never was a bed like it, all pillows and laces and tucks, with a valance covered with figures as wild as Orlando Furioso, and a coverlid as blue and white as the plates standing in a long row on the dresser. There were only two things in that kitchen she didn't consider beautiful; one was the blackened clay pipe of Farmer Storm always in evidence, either between his pursed-up thick and hairy lips, or lying on a ledge of the high mantel; the other was Saskia's spindle, which began its whirring whenever Mrs. Storm coddled her.

The old farmer was in plain sight in the kitchen, when she passed the open door. She made a wide detour towards the out-houses. There were so many corn ricks standing like tops ready to spin. She loved to fancy the yellow ears gold of Guinea, like the ring her grandfather wore on his little finger. The great red barn, with a passageway through the middle into which the sun

seemed always shining from the east or west, was awesome in its size and plethoric fulness. And so many cows and horses and chickens and pigs! So many carts and wagons and wheelbarrows, such big oxen and such a huge grindstone! She half thought Farmer Storm must own the world.

There was a round knothole as big as a walnut in the side of the barn. She had often noticed it, but never looked through it. What should she see if she put her eye to that hole? Perhaps something as strange as Dolph Heyliger had beheld, when he spent the night in the deserted mansion.

Saskia, ever on the alert, and quick in intuition, and watching the child from inside the barn, soon perceived that her own favorite point of observation was to be examined. With a cunning stare, she applied her eye to the hole at the moment when Susanna, dreamily fanciful, looked in. That yellowish streaked orb with aquamarine hues terrorized her and for a few seconds held her spellbound. The proximity was awful. She believed she saw the devil. Finally, something horribly familiar jarred her intelligence, and with a cry, she turned and ran.

It was several weeks before Mrs. Storm could induce her to return to neighborly relations. When she did, she avoided Saskia.

CHAPTER III

THE Dutton house stood at the junction of two roads: one, the highway, along which, in mild weather, and as regularly as the precession of the equinoxes, the hauling of slate began and ended; the other, a steep mountain by-way, leading almost immediately into a primeval forest, past an occasional isolated clearing containing a farmhouse with its group of out-buildings, and on over the Catskills to the sequestered valleys beyond.

The Dutch had bought or leased most of the arable land for miles around. Here and there had appeared an interloper, indifferent either to entail or the marriage of farms by proxy. Among these intruders had been Susanna's father. Failing health made a change of residence necessary, and, in a moment of impulse, he had bought the farm from an agent in New York, and before the thrifty Dutch were aware it was in the market.

Irish born and bred, well introduced, a graduate of Dublin University, affable, witty, and light-hearted, he became the beau of the Connecticut town where he was professor of ancient languages for two years. It was here he met and married Margaret Dutton. The marriage brought him the responsibility of Margaret's aging mother and her valetudinarian grandfather; but these responsibilities had no terrors for the confident young Irishman. Moreover, he prided himself on being a Geraldine, and the Breretons, his wife's maternal family, were not only of the stock of colonial founders, but were lineal descendants of a race older than England. They were simple, upright, proud, pious, with a burdened conscientiousness over every decision they made, — a dignified, serene conviction that their position and name were sources of moral influence not to be held in light esteem either by themselves or others. They took their very

existence with a sweet and haughty seriousness, very disarming.

Through three generations in America, the Breretons had suffered rigorous privation; existence had been keyed to two notes — faith in God and endurance. Through two generations they had accumulated wealth according to the standard of their times, and with it had come easier habits of living and a return to the more elegant usages always maintained by the English branch of the family. Their views were American; that is, they were a blending of the most intense democracy and superlative aristocracy.

But family destinies are like oceans — tidal; further, they are composed of sweet and bitter waters; and again, it is neither the man who has sinned nor the one who has been sinned against that logically represents either the ebb or the flood. The decline of the Breretons began with the marriage of Margaret's mother, — a failure only in worldly ways; now, it was Margaret herself who realized how quickly, by change of residence, by loss of income, by meagreness of association, outward conditions can swiftly and apparently effectually obliterate all those small but comforting distinctions which good birth, breeding, property, and long residence in one locality laboriously accumulate.

To Susanna, Connecticut seemed as mythical as England or Ireland, and household service, in her mother's rigid notion of the term, an unknown quantity. Necessity was making the principle of democracy dominant to each one of the little group, and aristocratic claims and views, if held more rigidly, were never proclaimed.

The change of home proved disastrous in every sense to Ralph Kildare. The farm in which he had invested Margaret's money, inherited from an uncle, kept his family exiled on alien soil, after his death, and where they were objects at once of curiosity and suspicion. He left the weather-beaten old house he had purchased still unpainted, and other improvements he had projected, such as porches and shutters, not begun. The original design of the structure had evidently never been completed by the first builder. The gable facing the junction of the two roads leered like a Cyclops, its one eye Susanna's lone attic window. To this end, in the strip of land between the two roads, Kildare had intended to

add a substantial wing in the near future. Underneath the attic window was a door, ostensibly an inside door, but at the time this story opens, an outside one, leading directly from the parlor into a space whose height was measured by the cellar wall and the slope of the side-hill against which the house nestled. Such a home, abutting upon the highway, wore an unpleasant publicity to these New Englanders, and it was an offence to their Dutch neighbors, as well, whose roomy homesteads and roomier barns stood withdrawn behind fields or groves from the public gaze. The only purpose for which the house might prove advantageously salable was that of a roadside tavern; and when, after months of inquiry, this fact was made plain to Mrs. Dutton and her daughter, their pride and scruples were both aroused, and they abandoned their efforts to move away. If old Egerton Brereton had not clung, notwithstanding much general senility, to his small income, the family would have been in a sorry plight indeed.

Only Susanna and Janey loved a home, whose location, to the tense natures of their elders, appeared like a public contradiction of their principles and a daily exposure of their circumstances.

To the children, the wood-house and wagon-house combined, on the opposite side of the road, and at the end of the lawn which was the object of Farmer Storm's covetous desire, did not seem, as they did to Mrs. Kildare, blots disfiguring the view from the front windows. To them, it was a reservoir of miscellanies; for it had a loft reached by a ladder, and the loft was overflowing with superfluous furniture, brought from New England fairyland. It mattered not to them that the dilapidated gate of the barnyard sagged on its hinges, requiring all their combined strength to lift on the few occasions when they found it closed. It was so easy to skurry through this gate, if errands grew too numerous, and thence out of sight round the low ledge of crumbling slaty rock forming a kind of natural embankment on which the garden and lawn extended behind the locusts. And under this ledge was the barn, invisible from the house, except the very peak of its roof, which gave it in perspective an air at once of nearness and aloofness. A foot-bridge led from the lawn to a window in the peak of the barn, and on this

Susanna would enact the drama of Mirzah, but never letting her imagination run riot to the extent of dropping her through the gaps between the decaying timbers to the cart-track below leading to a succession of fields, each with its distinctive name.

The well-lot, the lower ledge, the upper ledge, the huckleberry knoll, the three-corner patch, the pasture-lot, the red quarry, the gray quarry, the cold spring, the spring by the brook, the spring in the well-lot, the big falls, the middle falls, and the lower falls,—each of these terms was expressive to her of beloved haunts.

The lawn, upon which a picket gate opened under the fragrant locusts, while neither closely shaven nor velvety, had a meadowy richness; for the grass grew rank and vividly green, bunching up here and there into boggy depths of softness. A path ran through it bordered with old-fashioned flowers,—pinks, yellow roses, Johnny-jump-ups, bachelor's-buttons, and four-o'clocks. The path ended in a flight of rough stairs leading to the creek, at this point a narrow, swift stream gathering its forces to make a steep plunge over the ledge which formed the embankment of the plateau.

Altogether the farm was a wild, romantic spot, where Kildare might well have thought that the sunshine striking its steep hills, the dry winds blowing from the mountains, and the abundant water which the creek provided would assure him length of years.

The soil, which there was quite a show of cultivating during his lifetime, now rioted in weeds and wild berries, with here and there an isolated field tilled on shares by another interloper in that wide Dutch settlement. Old Harry, whose name certainly belied his character, was an escaped Virginian slave; he occupied on sufferance a cabin in a small clearing up the mountain road, which he had eventually bought. He had also earned and bought the freedom of his wife, Celinda. Harry and Celinda were the only colored people in a circuit of many miles, and when the Kildares had come into the district, just before Susanna's birth, the law of need and supply, as well as a tacit recognition on the part of all of the loneliness of their condition, cemented an intimacy of dependence on the one hand and helpfulness on the other. An acre of corn, another of wheat, and a third of potatoes,

in addition to the garden, supplied the need of both families, and as for stock, a couple of cows, a rheumatic horse, a brood of chickens on which Saskia Storm looked with contempt, and a pair of oxen completed the inventory.

Celinda, much younger than Harry, was Mrs. Dutton's helper, in the literal and beautiful interpretation of that term, coming to the old lady whenever occasion demanded, but, the greater part of the time, staying at home in her cabin, where the sense of freedom made a perpetual well-spring of contentment. Mrs. Dutton's rigid uprightness would never let her absorb an hour of Celinda's time without its due equivalent, and Harry's wages were paid with all the more punctiliousness because of a perception on his part that he had found a mistress to whom service was a pleasure, and more especially because Mrs. Dutton soon learned that his mental capacity regarding values was most limited.

At such times, therefore, when Mr. Egerton Brereton either withheld his money or declared it exhausted, his daughter would for weeks together perform all the manual labor for the family, a task hard for her increasing years and diminishing strength, and in marked contrast to the circumstances of her earlier life.

But in June, when the weather is at its prime; when the valleys are heaving with tumultuous growth, and the mountains are one with the sky in the aqueous blue of their changeable sheen; when there is a radiant force of life in the very song of the bird, the breath of the flower, and the sunshine, so early to come and so late to go, — then old hearts renew a cheery acquiescence in things as they are, and the little world they find themselves in takes on a glamour akin to that of youth, and mere existence has a sweetness savoring of immortality.

In such a mood was Mr. Egerton Brereton as he walked hand in hand with Susanna and Janey, one afternoon, down the flower-bordered walk of the garden where Harry was busy sticking in the brushwood for the early peas.

The robins, like knickerbockers of the air, were strutting with heads erect, proclaiming their dominion in imperious tones. A late apple tree was dropping its petals in a shower of white silence. The atmosphere was tak-

ing on deep, tender tones; the mountains were growing darkly blue, and from the creek, to which the trio were going, came a rich, cool gurgle, while on the huckleberry knoll, on the farther side of the stream, waved in an intermittent breeze a cluster of sugar pines, emitting with each surging and resurgent rise and fall of their palm-like branches a delicious aromatic scent.

"Banpa, I'se fwaid," said Janey, after vainly trying to emulate Susanna's quick scramble down the flight of rude steps and shrinking back from the tumbling, leaping water.

The aged man took the little damsel of three in his arms, his spare, attenuated frame quivering under the burden. Janey's fairness beside the yellow parchment of his little shrivelled face looked uncanny.

On the bit of sward, at the foot of the steps and sheltered from the afternoon sun by the ledge, was a bench, and on this the old man sat down, panting from his unwonted effort. Janey climbed up beside him. Susanna watched the rushing current with a vague, eager longing.

"It's time to wead, S'anna," said Janey. "Give S'anna the paper, banpa."

Mr. Brereton took from his pocket the *National Era*, unfolded it with a decorous gravity which Janey watched delightedly, and peering through it with his small, keen eyes, pointed to a long column.

Susanna, sitting very straight and drawing nearer to the old man's ear craned towards her, began,—"Latest Congressional Report. Must I read it all?" she asked, a little drearily.

"What a question! Yes. Of course!"

She read on, emphasizing, as if they were milestones, the occasional names. As she did so, Janey would repeat softly to herself, "Dan'l Webster, John C. Calhoun," looking sideways at her grandfather for approval.

He sat with his cane between his legs, his hands clasped over its top, his long, prominent chin resting upon the prop thus made. Occasionally he would correct Susanna's pronunciation; once he glanced at Janey and smiled as she lisped, "Cathuth M. Clay," and ejaculated, "A man, little Janey—every inch a man!" The child bridled with innocent pride as if she had dis-

covered the statesman and had presented him to her grandfather.

When the report was finished, Susanna glanced over the columns with a ludicrous shrewdness; for the reading was a frequent affair, and with a quick perception of agreeable values, she had learned to know the items prized by her exacting listener.

"Oh, here's sompin about the new man, grandpa—about Abam Linkon!"

"Yes?" and his deep-set eyes glittered. "Read it." Susanna read.

"Now see if there is news from the Republican Convention."

"A great big piece about it. See!" and she made a violent rattling and folding of the paper.

"What is a 'publican 'vention, banpa?" Janey laid her head against the old man's arm, and when he did not answer, scratched on his knee, like a gentle pussy.

"I know!" exclaimed Susanna, as Janey repeated, "Banpa, what is a 'publican 'vention?"

The valetudinarian looked with a kind of furtive pride at the older child as she began, "Don't you remember, Janey? It's a lot of good men, who go to a big, big room—just like you and me goes to the wood-house—and they talks about John Brown—just as you and me plays redcoats."

Janey nodded delightedly.

"And they hold up their hands and swear they won't hurt poor slaves, which Harry was, Janey—"

"Oh, yes," the little one cried, "an' they says, 'Yun, boys, yun, the yedcoats is comin'!' don't they?"

"They say, my child, the bloodhounds are coming!" and Egerton Brereton made such a pounce at her that she screamed with pleasure.

Susanna frowned at her grandfather. She did not want to be interrupted. She reclaimed her listener by exclaiming, dramatically, "An' then what d'you think, sister, they talks about? Jes' guess."

"Gen'l Fwemont!"

Susanna shook her head, tightening her lips in negation.

"They talks 'bout the fences between the Norf and the Souf!"

"Do you mean the Wilmot Proviso, pet?" inquired Mr. Brereton, and Janey nodded assent.

"Oh, no, they doesn't!" insisted Susanna. "They talk about bleedin' Kansas. You know they talk about that, grandpa!"

"I should fink," said Janey, "they would tell the story 'bout the poor man what was hit in the head."

"Oh, Charles Sumner!" retorted Susanna, contemptuously. "He's getting well, he is. They talk—they talk—" she drew herself up and her eyes sparkled, "they talk about—war!"

"War?" inquired Janey, wonderingly.

Satisfied that she had produced a sense of mystification, and observing that her grandfather had floated away from their talk in a nap, Susanna threw the paper on the grass and, beckoning to her little sister, ran to a spot where the sunlight struck a deep pool outside the eddy of the current. They knelt down with absorbing curiosity, the child of eight putting her arm protectingly around her sister.

"Let me frow the crumbs in, S'anna; p'ease let me."

"Course you shall, Janey." She loved the feeling of munificence, and smiled benevolently as Janey with trembling eagerness sprinkled the bits of bread upon the water.

A sunfish darted out from under a stone covered with delicate, ferny mould. Janey tried to puff her cheeks in emulation of his gills. "Him's dot him's wife with him," she whispered, as his companion swung around the stone as airily as a sailboat veering to the wind.

"See, see, Janey! There's a tadpole. Doesn't he look fierce? Oh, don't you wish he would turn into a frog this minute and let us see how he does it? Let's pray that he will turn now."

Both children, with whispered vehemence, were imploring the heavenly powers for the transformation, when the solitude of their surroundings was invaded by a blatant toot-too-oot, and their grandfather awoke with a start.

"Oh, the heathen!" he exclaimed, "calling people to meals in that way. It's barbarous; it's deafening."

"Why, grandpa?" asked Susanna, wistfully; for to be summoned from field and barn by a monstrous tin horn

such as she sometimes watched Mrs. Storm blow into was one of her ambitions.

"Why?" He shook his head despairingly. "It's unrefined; it's vulgar." He paused, spent with the flurry of emotion and resting well-nigh a century's weight of cares upon his cane, while slowly straightening to his full height. He sighed, looked up to the sky, glanced at the swaying pines, and then, letting his eyes rest on the little girls an instant, smiled indulgently and mournfully.

Each, feeling the affectionateness of his glance, flew to grasp a hand, Susanna balancing the cane in her other, and the trio slowly followed the thread of a path leading from the creek to the broader one under the locusts.

Thrown upon one another so intimately for companionship, childhood and age, subtly recognizing their common bond of weakness and limitation, came into tenderest sympathy, blending the wisdom of innocence with the not less beautiful wisdom of a personal renunciation on which time had set its quieting seal.

CHAPTER IV

"WELL, mum, I think I'd better be for beginnin' the wall to-day. I'll follow the line of the main cellar, carryin' it up to the level of that lonesome door; thin, with a row of supports like through the middle of the new part, we can cover the top with flags from your own quarries, put a layer of rich soil from the swamp atop of the hill over the flags, lay a bit of sod atop of that, and plant a flower here an' there, and make a decent flight of steps leadin' down from a leetle path runnin' from that parlor door, and thin you'll hev a front yard sech es eny leddy should be hevin' and a way of intrance quite dignified and imposin'. And thin too, thet extry cellar will be dry for storin' things, handy for the wood in winter, and a raal fine room for Celindy to wash in whan the weather is unpropeetious."

Mrs. Dutton's face reflected the Scotchman's animation; but, blended with her pleasure in the prospect of more space and an out-of-doors approach to the upper rooms, was an anxiety as to ways and means.

"You understand, Mr. MacDuffy, that for payment you are to have two weeks' use of the red quarry?"

"Aye, aye, mum, I onderstand, and I'm free to say that I shall consider meself recompensed sufficient to put wan other item in the contract. I'm somethin' of a carpenter as well as a mason, and I'll mek two doors, — wan from this new cellar into your livin'-room, as well as an outside wan; and I'll build a leetle window, too, if you'll furnish the glass, and in that way you can have all the light you want. Then, besides," he scratched his grizzled locks, glancing at the widow as if his idea were not without humor, "suppose, to save interferin' in any ways with the draft of the main chimbly, we change our plan of openin' a communication with it, and build a new fireplace, wan

into which you can run the pipe of a stove—if you'd ever be wishin' to buy sech a new-fangled notion—or where you could joost place a fine backlog, with pine knots fur company, and with the chimbly comin' a leetle to one side like of your front yard, and where it would never be noticed. I'd warrant a roarin', fetchin' draft,—and, es fur es June-bugs an' skeeters an' sech like, why, whenever you'd a fire below you'd hev peace above from all the sizzlin' an' hummin' an' bitin' which I may well say is the general affliction of a fine summer night."

"But the smoke? Wouldn't it draw into the parlor and set Mrs. Kildare coughing? You know that everything is to be done so that she can sit up-stairs where it is dryer and sunnier and so that she can come around to her meals through the pretty yard and down the low sloping stairs you are to build."

"I'll take good care of Mrs. Kildare, mum, never fear. I don't see her around. I hope she's none the worse."

"She hasn't come down-stairs yet. But here is my little Susanna. Come and speak to Mr. MacDuffy, dear."

"How aire ye, miss," and the Scotchman held out his hand.

She returned the proffer, but with a tentative look and manner.

"She's not a Kildare, or she'd be trustin' me immediate. Don't I look like an honest man an' kind?"

"I'm a Brereton," she said proudly, ignoring the question.

"The land's sake, you are! Ha, ha!" He laughed heartily.

"I don't like you! I don't want you to build our cellar. Tell him to go home, grandma."

"Hu-sh. Go see if your mother is ready. And wait for her and steady her hand on her way down-stairs."

As she turned away, MacDuffy said in a rollicking, teasing manner, "I perceive there's a Kildare kink in your hair. You're no altogether a Brereton." To Mrs. Dutton, he continued, "The leetle gal has determination an' speerit enough in her eyes for a mon, she has!"

An access of reserve in the widow's aspect made the loquacious Scotchman assume an attentive and serious attitude.

"I don't know much about building," she said, "and

if I did, it wouldn't matter. What we both want, I am sure, is fair dealing and no favors."

"Who would be thinkin' otherwise, mum?"

"Do the best you can for me, and always with my daughter in your mind. In return, you are to have the full use of the red quarry for two weeks. I should think you and your son, in that time, could cut and haul considerable flagging. The quarry is in good condition for working."

"Joost look out for your eend, Mrs. Dutton, and I will look out for mine. It's to-day I'll begin with the cellar, and Saunders an' me'll mek quick work of it. We'll do your job fust, and then we'll attend to the quarry. I'll be back with my boy an' team in an hour."

"Have you had breakfast?" she asked, with a recurring memory of neighborhood hospitality.

"Yes, mum. I hed me bite two hours ago. But, sence you ask, if it won't onconvenience you, I'll tek a cup of your coffee, for I've been a-smellin' it with a growin' appetite; give it me standin', es if I war the children of Israel."

"We are all pilgrims and strangers, Mr. MacDuffy," she said impressively, while pouring the coffee. "But we are journeying to a land where there is rich store of milk and honey."

"It may be, it may be!" draining the cup and wiping his mouth with his sleeve. "But there's nothin' more delectious than good coffee, mum, except now and then a glass of whiskey. I'm a-fearin' we'll hev neither coffee nor whiskey in Paradise, mum."

With a glint of amusement in an otherwise elevated and gently pious expression, Mrs. Dutton hurried towards the staircase, down which she heard Susanna's tripping step with frequent haltings, as if the child were being helpful. "We shall never hunger or thirst there."

"More's the peety, more's the peety. Good mornin', mum," and, satisfied with having the last word, he hurried out of one door as Susanna and her mother entered by another.

Mrs. Kildare's cheek had the bright glow so often mistaken for health. Her eyes, darkly and solemnly brilliant with the last fierce effort of the fires of life, beamed

with cheerful affectionateness as she kissed her mother's firm, white cheek, square with the dewlap of healthy age.

Susanna held her hand protectingly and Janey clung to her side, burrowing in her dress and smiling at Mrs. Dutton with a large confidence and expectation as if her grandmother were a visible rock of ages.

The building project made a stir of talk at breakfast, and the children, too, grew full of plans, Susanna intending that very day to set Harry at work on a lean-to he had long promised to build for Janey and her, against the bit of stone wall between the wood-house and the barn-yard gate.

And when MacDuffy duly arrived with a load of stone and sand and lime, and his gaunt, tall son, Saunders, began to fling the stones to the earth, as if they were pebbles, the little girls walked hither and thither like inspectors, — being as much in the way and as full of importance, — and Susanna was ready to burst with pride because something at last was taking place at her house. Whether it was because Harry's gardening suffered so many interruptions from the help he had to give MacDuffy, or whether an impulse to show his hand at building stirred his amiable soul, the lean-to took shape on one side of the turnpike while the stone wall grew solidly on the other side. No song of bird or sighing of summer wind or whisper of the pines could have sounded sweeter to Susanna than the clinking of Saunders' hammer in breaking a stone, or the rat-tat-tat of Harry's as he nailed the boards into shape for the future playhouse.

Janey sat in her little chair under the locusts nearest the scene of Babel, rocking and watching and nursing her dolly. Susanna, bethinking her of certain matronly duties she daily performed with Sancho in the wood-house, and the dog coming into evidence at an inauspicious moment for his comfort, she said imperiously, "Come, Sancho, come take your nap."

He shrank in a propitiating heap at her feet, but she was not to be dissuaded when everybody else was doing something. She must have her own individual concern, too. It was all very well to watch the masons and Harry for a time, but none of them took her advice or suggestions.

Picking the dog up with determination and patting him energetically while saying, "There! there!" she

whisked into the house for her "victoria," a voluminous, gay plaid cape which she buttoned around his hot neck, wrapping its ample folds about his hotter body. Up and down under the locusts she walked with her unwilling infant, trying to sing him to sleep with nursery rhymes.

"You naughty boy," she said with sad conviction, as he kept kicking and whining. "Mamma will have to rock you to sleep. She's just tired out, your poor mamma is. We must go to the wood-house."

The salient object in the wood-house was a cradle, much like the one in which Peregrine White was rocked. It had held numerous Breretons in times past; in it, Susanna's mother had slept away many an afternoon on the wide porches of her New England home; she herself had felt the motion of its substantial rockers, and still remembered how Janey looked in the prim wooden receptacle with its high back and sides. Since Janey's day, the cradle had found its way to the wood-house loft, from which it had been brought down for Sancho's need.

She threw the patient creature with considerable vehemence into the cradle, where he lay flat on his back, his paws making little mountains in the victoria.

"Shut your eyes," she said severely.

He did so, his lids trembling violently.

She began to rock. Sancho opened his eyes half-way.

"Shut your eyes."

The dog hesitated to obey.

Lifting him by his conspicuous paws, she dropped him warningly on the cradle floor.

He drew a long convulsive breath, closed his eyes and kept them closed while she rocked vigorously, singing, "Hush-a-by, baby, on the tree-top."

At this juncture, Janey came in to say, "S'anna, Peter Vroom is under the locusts. He wants to speak to you."

"Has babens had his little nap?" she inquired, crooningly, and Sancho, recognizing the change of tone, opened his eyes and began to wiggle his whole body.

"Then he shall come out and see Peter, he shall."

Joyfully weighting herself with the burdens of motherhood, she issued from the wood-house, her slight frame bent to one side with her by no means airy load, the gay circular hanging down like an infant's long clothes, while the dog, permitted an upright position, thrust his ebony

head forward, lolling his red tongue and snapping at flies as occasion permitted.

Peter stood leaning against the biggest tree in the row, and, as she appeared, viewed her half in admiration, half in contempt.

"I don't like to be kept a-waiten for a dog."

"He isn't a dog; he's my own dear little boy."

"If he ain't a dog, he cert'nly looks like one. I swan, your baby's got a fair skin — fair es Janey's."

"It's only sunburnt," declared Susanna.

"Whew! It looks burnt to cinder. Ef I wus you, I'd play with a wax baby — or a rag doll."

"Wax dolls won't cry, and rag dolls is only fit to be drowned. I've drowned six dolls." Her air and tone challenged wonder.

"Well, I swan! You'd oughter ben a boy."

"I wouldn't be a boy!" she exclaimed contemptuously.

"Mamma says dirls is tomforts," murmured Janey, arching her neck, and only half understanding the discussion.

"What's she say?" inquired Peter of the older sister.

"She says girls are comforts, and I think they are, too. If my mother says they are comforts, they are!"

Peter laughed derisively.

Janey's lip began to tremble.

"Run away from the naughty boy, Janey. Such a dreadful boy — with a freckled face," she added, in retaliation for the scorn heaped upon Sancho.

Peter sobered. "Freckles ain't nothin'," he said apologetically.

"Yes, they is!" contradicted Susanna, triumphantly.

"They makes your face look so dirty. Janey and me hasn't got no freckles. We wouldn't have them, would we, Janey?"

"No-o! We wouldn't have them," repeated the little one with a scorn that melted in the saying. Passive and timid because of her fragility, she ran into the house to escape the war of words, and Peter, content to have Susanna to himself, said patronizingly, —

"I've brought you somethin'." He thrust his hands into his pockets, wanting her to exhibit curiosity and eagerness. Instead, she leaned against the opposite tree,

her heels stuck into the sod, her toes pointing belligerently upward, her eyes studiously peering through the branches at the sky.

"S'anna, did you hear?"

"Yes."

"Don't you care?"

She puckered her mouth and shook her head tantalizingly.

"Guess!"

"Fish-worms, I suppose."

Peter eyed her searchingly.

"Wrong. Guess again."

"Oh, nothing. You never really has anything, Peter Vroom. I wouldn't mind guessing for Nicholas Storm."

"H'm, see, then, if I hasn't somethin'!"

She condescended to look at the extended hand. It was full of cherries, ripe and sweet. There was an involuntary longing and sparkle in her eyes.

"I bet you ain't seed eny before this summer."

She took them, but turned them cautiously over. When she found the first one worm-eaten, she looked up sharply. Peter's face was amiable and stolid. The next one had been pecked by a bird. One by one, as the examination progressed, the cherries proved worthless.

"They every one has worms, I do believe. Here!" and she thrust the gift back.

"I don't mind worms," he said defiantly. "I'll eat 'em up before you." He began to make a fine show of enjoying the cherries, but diverted her attention by taking from the other pocket another handful of beautiful, faultless fruit.

"Peter," said Susanna, solemnly, but after eating the luscious cherries, "I'm 'fraid you're a rascal."

"What d'you mean?" he demanded sternly, and feeling a shrewd right in doing so, since she found fault with him after enjoying his generosity.

She shook her head, as if his sin were too deep for words.

"Ef you don't take thet back, I'll go home right away. Take thet back."

MacDuffy now approached. "It's Peter Vroom, isn't it?" he inquired suavely.

Peter smiled, flattered with the notice.

"Would you mind lendin' me a hand, lad, to the liftin' "

of a heavy stone? You joost need to boost it like, while Saunders an' me doos the raal liftin'."

He followed MacDuffy, leaving Susanna much impressed with his importance. She loitered after. To emphasize his strength and usefulness, he made a manly and successful effort.

The stone in place, the Scotchman drew forth a mottled bandanna handkerchief and mopped his face, shining like a peony. Then, feeling in either pocket of his breeches, he took out a jack-knife from one and a square of plug tobacco from the other.

Susanna's eyes dilated. Was that black thing liquorice? Her mouth watered, and more and more, as MacDuffy rolled the quid into his red cheek, solemnly happy. His shrewd little blue eyes invited the question she longed to ask. But she remained silent, and so, cutting off a generous slice, he handed it coaxingly to her.

She put it into her mouth eagerly, and rolling it with unconscious imitation into her cheek, fastened upon it vigorously.

A burning, smarting, stinging sensation followed.

"Oh, you wicked man," she cried, "you cheated me."

He rubbed his grizzled locks with both hands, laughing hilariously. Saunders laughed still louder.

"I didn't cheat you, miss. You should be cannier. An' then when a gal's curious, she must be punished. Leetle gals must be keerful. They must remember Eve, they must, an' Lot's wife. Both on 'em wuz punished fer curiosity."

She teetered on one foot, an uneasy, puzzled expression creeping over her countenance. The situation as it existed in her home seemed to be reversed. There, the feminine element was more active.

"You hev been meddlin' with men's doin's the livelong day, miss," he continued. "If you want to be a mon, you must tek a mon's pleasures. I find the terbaccer very gude, — v-e-r-y gude, indeed!"

She looked from one to the other wistfully; the reasoning was deeper than her logic.

Peter regarded her with tantalizing superiority.

"Go play with your dolly," said MacDuffy, conclusively, "and let the b'y stay with me. He's got the strength of

a mon, Peter has, and I'm sure he'd ruther help us set the stones than fiddle-faddle with leetle gals."

"You shouldn't praise him," she exclaimed, exasperated. "He has been naughty. He tried to cheat me with wormy cherries."

"I doobt he did na say they war gude. Now did you, Peter?"

"Well, he handed them to me as if they were," urged the New England conscience of the child.

"An' quite right—quite right! Whar'd all the bargainin' be if folks didna act joost so? Ah! you're no canny."

"He was naughty," she insisted, doggedly.

"The sun shines on the joost an' the unjoost," replied MacDuffy, sententiously.

She glanced at the sky with an expression of awe, struck dumb for an instant with the heathenism of the sun.

"There's a way of dealin' with humonity thet defies a mon's ken," the Scotchman went on. "I'm thinkin' that whether Peter's good or bad, he's the knack of success. He's worldly wise, Peter is. I bet he knowed what terbaccer wuz, before he wuz es big es you."

This was the climax for Susanna. "Stop!" she cried, stamping her foot.

"Gurls hev no need to know 'bout terbaccer," said Peter, loftily.

Susanna gave him a glance of supreme reproach. If she did prefer to be a girl, she did not want her wit or her knowledge questioned on that score.

She had but one solace when sorely grieved. This was the huckleberry knoll, and her place of retreat was a growing pine tree on the ledgy precipice overhanging the creek.

The coolness and shadows from the mountains were making themselves felt when she reached the knoll. The summit of its limited acreage was covered with a thick, undisturbed carpet of pine needles. In the sunnier spots, the huckleberry bushes already in bloom sent forth an intermittent and delicate perfume. A light wind waved the outstretched arms of the majestic pines and the susurrus of their mysterious whispers breathed a language far more akin to the vague longings and dreamy suscepti-

bilities of the little girl than her tender years might warrant. Reaching one hand over the other to grasp the closely set limbs of her favorite tree, she almost walked to her seat near the top. Here, clasping her arms around the trunk, her head leaning against the mossy bark, the sunshine flickering her with warmth, and the long mysterious wash of sound appealing to her and adjuring her to quietness, she forgot her small perplexities. Back and forth she rocked in nature's cradle; now bent over the ledge and seeing below her the pools and swirls of the creek; now swaying to where the wonderful blueness of the sky, visible through the veil of green above, made an arch of ravishing color. Another set of sensations and satisfactions, of queries and recollections, of ambitions and delights, swept out of sight Peter and the cherries,—the Scotchman and his philosophy. The ancient mother of mothers was perpetuating in one of her infants the spirit of wonder, the feeling of the unseen, and fostering the spiritual through the touch and fragrance of a pine tree, the motion of a mountain stream, and that blueness of the sky which is like the expression of a soul-lit eye.

CHAPTER V

THE cellar, and finally the primitive roof garden on its summit, progressed steadily if slowly, and, by July, the bleak-looking north gable wore an altogether different aspect. The copse of young locusts at the left shielded the doorway from the mountain road, while back of the house and under their shade a path led to the apple orchard. The high, stairless, inside door under the attic window now opened on a grass plot, and in and out of the square parlor hummed the children like bees, bringing their store of flowers and berries, pine cones and green nuts for their mother's inspection.

Sometimes a fire was built in the deep fireplace, and around it, on chilly or rainy evenings, the little family would gather, renewing a sense of their former prosperity. The high, white, wooden mantel was flanked at either end by pink-lined sea-shells. Between the shells were glass candelabra whose joints, if touched, produced a musical jingle, delightful to the children. Above the candelabra hung an oil painting of Egerton Brereton, taken in his prime. Sometimes Janey and Susanna stood before it, perplexity in their eyes and incredulity in their tones.

"He don't look that way now, does he, S'anna?"

She shook her head. "I don't believe he ever did. He's s-o little and s-o thin and s-o yellow. He has such little bits of eyes — and here he's a great big man."

"Don't his eyes scare you, S'anna, when they shine at you?"

"They make me feel cold — just like I feel when I lean over Mrs. Vroom's well. It looks so black down there and it twinkles." She gave a shiver.

"He's dot nice clothes on, isn't he, S'anna?"

The elder sister let her gaze wander approvingly over

the blue knee-breeches, the lemon weskit, the deep lace frills about the white hands, and the powdered wig.

"Do you fink, S'anna, banma let him eat his bwefus in such nice fings?"

"I guess grandma was a little girl when he had his picture taken."

"Ain't banma always been big, S'anna?"

"Course not. Didn't you know she was a baby once?"

Janey appeared dazed with the idea.

But usually the little girls cared far more for the daily portrait of themselves in the gilt-framed mirror hanging between the front windows. Thither they would run together to see how much they had grown, but really to indulge a Narcissus pleasure in the reflection of their delicate and animated faces.

In essentials, the parlor was like the conventional "best room" of fifty years ago. There were gilt-bordered shades at the windows; there was a red and white ingrain carpet with an immense scroll pattern on the floor. A big, round table with a red cover stood in one corner, on which lay neat, cat-a-cornered piles of red and gilt-edged books—named "The Keepsake," "The Lady's Companion," "The Floral Offering." Sometimes there were flowers there, too—morning tributes from the little girls to their mother. In another corner, by the window overlooking the spot where the orchard and the copse of locusts joined, stood old Mr. Brereton's chair, a high-back, haircloth mahogany one with a deep seat and slender arms in which he seemed to shrink to still more attenuated dimensions. There were other chairs, a haircloth sofa, and one or two small tables on spindling legs; but the impression in Susanna's mind, years after, was of a large, bright room, with big spaces for playing tag, of windows admitting the sunshine all day long, of Janey's round face with its soaring forehead and pink bloom reflected in the mirror, of the open door and her mother sitting on the sill and gazing longingly down the white road and yet seeming not to see the highway.

Off the parlor and opposite the fireplace opened two doors, one leading into Mr. Brereton's bedroom, the other into Mrs. Dutton's, where her daughter and Janey also slept.

Her mother's broken nights and Janey's advent had

been so disturbing to Susanna, that, long before this story opens, a bed had been prepared for her in the old loom. She had only a dim recollection of ever having slept downstairs, and to her fearless, unsuppressed nature, the attic by night as well as by day was a place of unbounded pleasure. When mighty gales would beat against the house or scream and shriek through chinks in the shingles, when the apple trees would knock upon the clapboards, when the autumn rain would fall for days together, pattering heavily and resonantly above her head, or when, with a high wind in midwinter, the snow would drift in white curves over the floor, it was all one to her. She knew the meaning of every sound, and each was a theme for stories without number to her unsleeping imagination. What could be more delightful on a January morning than to spring out of bed and make footprints on the snow which Robinson Crusoe would discover while she was at breakfast! What could give more pleasing satisfaction on dark nights when the rats skurried hither and thither than to throw a handful of crumbs on the floor! How loud the silence in which she fancied them sitting on their haunches, listening, before making a grand sortie to her feast! At such times she would clasp her hands with delight and whisper, "O dear, dear rats, you were so hungry, I knowed you were!"

Meanwhile Janey slept a different sleep in her trundle-bed downstairs. Hers was no less heavy, but she gathered from it none of the sturdy endurance of her sister; she grew and bloomed, but all the time was a fading flower.

The August rains set in early, and if Sancho had not been in requisition more than usual as an infant in the wood-house and Janey as a duplicate Celinda, Mrs. Kildare would have found it more taxing than she ordinarily did to bear the daily noise and restlessness.

The shorter days and supper by candlelight gave the evenings an autumn aspect.

The cellar opening off the living room became flooded because of the long-continued rains. The mountains were obliterated. The locusts, which had yellowed under the fierce heat and drought of July, began to strew the path to the creek with leaves, making it look sodden and for-

saken. A fire burned continually in the parlor, and on either side of it sat the nonogenarian and the invalid.

Susanna developed a rampant spirit.

The fifth stormy day set in. The rain pelted the saturated earth with a steady downpour. The wind tossed the apple trees and the fruit fell bruised and scattered. The hand-to-mouth plenty of the table failed, and Mrs. Dutton, in extremity, prepared a dinner of mush and buttermilk for the little girls. Janey ate hers in silence and dutifully, but Susanna, ravenously hungry as she was, refused the humble fare with an air of dignity and injury.

"Buttermilk is pig's food, grandma. I can't eat such a dinner."

"Come, come, child. You can, if your betters can. It's all I've had."

"Did mamma have buttermilk?"

"Your mamma is sick."

"What did you give grandpa?"

"Susanna Vere Kildare, eat your dinner and ask no more questions."

She walked to the window, flattening her face against the pane. The possibilities of her grandmother's character passed in clear review before her analytic little soul. A vague foresight of triumph and desire for the same stirred within her. How hungry she was! If only she had eaten as many apples as usual! There was such a queer feeling of a cave under her waist! How big was the hole, anyway, from her throat down? She squeezed her sides in. Certainly, there seemed no end to it. It must be as large as those small sacks the Indian meal came in. Would she collapse like the bags, when they were empty, if she went hungry too long? Well, she would dare that, even though her head should fall off in consequence and her feet stop walking. She swelled her chest, rejoicing to find it still inflating.

"Child, don't be so naughty!"

She cast a weary glance at the table and turned sadly away. Oh, how hard it was not to yield.

The clock struck one. If she did not stop thinking about that buttermilk, she would have to taste it. She ran up stairs for "The Parent's Assistant," which was stern, hard reading, but it would help her hold out.

The clock struck two.

"Darling, won't you eat some dinner for grandma's sake?"

Her heart gave a tender throb, but her wise little brain grew more obdurate. The buttermilk really smelt quite good, though.

The clock struck three.

She felt sure that very soon, now, her head would fall off and her legs would fail. Perhaps, if she tried — What was her grandmother going into that dark, flooded cellar for? She listened to the cautious step, feeling its way along, now on an upturned keg, now on a plank laid on stones kept there for just such a crisis. Suppose she should slip! But, then, nothing ever did happen to her grandma.

Presently Mrs. Dutton appeared, bearing in one hand a jug of milk and poised on its top a plate of butter, in the other, a dish of preserves, some bread, and a lighted candle, — exhibiting that prehensile dexterity men and women display whose burdens are heavier than their strength.

The buttermilk and mush vanished out of sight, the daintier meal replacing them. "Come, child, come eat some of grandma's preserves and drink a glass of milk. Come right away or you will be sick."

She laid a handful of candies beside the small epicure's plate.

Sweets were rare, and Susanna looked up in glad surprise. Her hunger having been satisfied, but not her craving for dainties, she assorted the candies judiciously. One by one, and with an air of contemplative satisfaction, she ate the more luscious, putting the others in her pocket.

"Susanna," inquired Mrs. Dutton, with some severity, "why did you eat the best and save the poorest?"

"'Cause they would taste so much better first, when I hadn't had none in such a long, long time."

The old lady sighed heavily. "I'm afraid you have an improvident nature."

"Wouldn't you eat the best first, grandma?" she inquired, wonderingly, leaning on Mrs. Dutton's lap.

"No!" with solemn firmness.

"But, grandma, they might have growed stale!"

"Run up-stairs and see if your mother wants you. I hear her coughing."

She fled, glad to escape the notion of disgrace by turning her back on it, but gladder to be with her mother, whom she loved in a wistful, far-away fashion, as if Mrs. Kildare were a brittle and beautiful piece of porcelain.

As she came into the parlor, a thrush in the locusts cleft the air with the melody of its heavenly note, so liquid, so weighted with ecstasy and pain.

"Come here, my thrush," and Mrs. Kildare extended her arms.

Susanna sprang to her breast. She did not often lie there. She lay very still. She noticed the loud, quick beating of her mother's heart. Her sensitive little body thrilled like a violin under the gentle pressure of those loving arms. Suddenly, hugging the attenuated form convulsively, she reached up, pressing a kiss into the thin cheek glowing with such a pink spot.

"Do you love me, darling?"

"Y-e-s!"

"How much?"

"S-o much," squeezing harder.

"How much?" insisted Mrs. Kildare, fondly.

"Mr. Storm's barn full!" nestling back.

A smothered sigh escaped the mother's lips. She felt the despairing ache of a generous heart when it finds the only store it can offer its beloved an inadequate measure and an unknown symbol of plenty. It would be years before Susanna could know enough or feel enough to measure love by love only.

The night shut in and the storm gained a wilder vehemence. Mr. Brereton threw a fresh lot of cones on the fire, which the wind drew up the chimney with a roar. All sorts of fantastic shadows played upon the white ceiling. Mrs. Dutton was down-stairs and Janey was being put to bed by her mother. Susanna lay on the hearth, her foot wagging in the air, her hair in a tumble of curly profusion about her face as she devoured "The Scottish Chiefs."

Lost in retrospection, Mr. Brereton sat with his long, thin legs crossed, his claw-like hands resting on the arms of his chair, his sunken black eyes blinking and expanding. Occasionally, he whispered to himself and a smile,

senile, proud, and disappointed, flickered over his countenance. He was rehearsing the glories of his ancestry and casting a quick forward glance to the present, his mind working back and forth like a shuttle. Kings and dukes, earls and barons, chancellors and sheriffs, admirals and archbishops, paced down the centuries. Roundheads and cavaliers, puritans and churchmen, filed past. Colonial justices and patentees followed close behind. Revolutionary governors and generals pressed for recognition. Patriot soldiers and divines and godly citizens and fearless pioneers followed—all were of one stock, and while variations were infinite, witnessed to the same blood, the same religion, to kindred ambitions, to the stuff in body, mind, and heart which wrought for God, country, and home. Who was left of the long line? Who was to hand down the story and glow with its inspiration?—alas, Susanna, only! One little girl, who could not bequeath the name, who could not emulate their illustrious examples, and who, neither through fortune, opportunity, or sex, could claim the place her ancestors had occupied through so many generations. His chin dropped upon his breast.

She looked up. "What's the matter, grandpa?"

"Come here, I have something to tell you before it is too late." There was an impressive urgency in his tone and manner which made her spring to her feet. Climbing up to the arm of his chair, and leaning back, her head above his, she reclined there, gazing down at him with an easy nonchalance and expectation.

"Are you going to tell me a story?"

"A true story which you are never to forget!"

"I don't believe it can be so good as 'The Scottish Chiefs.' They's splendid."

"Mine is a splendid, true story. Now listen sharp," he said adjuringly, in a high quavering voice.

As anecdote and history and tradition blended in one recital, they impressed themselves upon her memory as with a seal, that, come what might, she was never to forget she was a Brereton; and set to a rhythm of roaring fire within and tumultuous winds without, and a kind of prophetic intensity as if her grandfather were a seer.

He had the narrator's gift of fitting to childish ears facts otherwise dry enough,—of family letters from kings; of estates confiscated and restored; of nobles

renowned as commanders of armies; of a certain lord committed to the Tower for treason, but afterward acquitted by his peers; of the further history of this valiant man guarding the Protestant Succession and demanding of James II., in the name of the Prince of Orange, that the king should leave a palace named Whitehall; of the elevation of this lord, first as Privy Councillor and afterward as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

As each story within the tale was rehearsed, Susanna was made to repeat it; and then on and on the narrative continued, till the ocean was crossed, and she heard of Indians and Indian wars; of stress of hunger and poverty; of a colonial president of a council also removed for treason but afterward made governor, because, instead of a traitor, he had shown himself to be one of the first American patriots. And now, the enchanting name Connecticut appeared, and a vision rose before her of a big, white house with high pillars, of tall trees shaped like harps, called elms, of first settlers, of Breretons who were esquires, of Revolutionary soldiers, — but each one, whatever his place, his fortune, or his circumstances, proving himself a Brereton through and through.

When at length the old man paused, panting slightly and with something in his aspect making the child realize that he did look like his picture after all, she exclaimed, "List'n to me, grandpa. I'll tell you the story. It's fine! I know it all."

As he followed her glib recital, he gazed at her half wistfully, half superciliously. Her ready memory was but the crackling of underbrush soon to be consumed in the flame of wisdom. The torrid fires of experience and reflection had destroyed in him the power to learn verbatim. But as his memory of childhood and youth had been a never-failing well, so would hers doubtless be; and the vivid impressions she had received would inspire her in character and deed to strive to be a Brereton of the Breretons, and to hand down, if not their name, the story of their dignity and the spirit of their valor, goodness, and ability.

Veteran and child gradually relapsed into revery.

The trend of Susanna's was apparent in the first question she asked.

"You don't think, do you, that the Breretons were ever so poor that they loved buttermilk?"

"I doubt if they liked such a watery beverage, child. But some of them were poor enough to drink it and be thankful it was no worse."

There was a long pause.

"They wouldn't drink it if they could get milk, would they, grandpa?"

"They expected and claimed the best there was to be had—always. Never forget that."

"I won't, grandpa."

There was another long pause.

"Do you think the Breretons was improvident, grandpa?"

The small black eyes twinkled. Their owner was on the little girl's trail. But he had a temptation in common with many families not Breretons. "The Kildares were what I should call improvident; the Breretons were generous."

Mrs. Dutton coming up-stairs at this juncture, Susanna was sent to bed. Before she fell asleep, she had decided to name the lean-to Whitehall.

CHAPTER VI

THE harvests having been gathered and the boys of the neighborhood being more at leisure, and the community priding itself on having school kept "two quarters" out of every year, Mr. Vroom and a half-dozen other farmers bestirred themselves to this effect. The times and seasons were movable dates dependent on local taxes, the number of pupils, and an available teacher. Although the decision to open the school was formed in August, the delay was accounted legitimate when the preparations were completed in October.

A messenger rode from house to house, heralding the date when "our deestrick school will begin," and the name of "our teacher" as Mr. Louis Catherwood. Information was also given that Mr. Catherwood would "board round," and receive twenty-five dollars a month. This itinerating had a twofold purpose. It saved the payment of ready money, a few meeting their entire school-tax by "keeping" the teacher a given interval; again, the presence of an instructor in the family was considered a means of culture for the young, and an opportunity for much conversation to edification on the part of their elders. The teacher stood second only to the domine, and the best a home had to offer in hospitality was considered his legitimate due. His presence in a house, moreover, was the occasion for merrymaking, and "teas," "bees," "huskings," and "straw-rides" celebrated his advent like a brass band that of a political campaign.

Throughout the length and breadth of the Hudson River region, teachers were procured from New England, and chiefly from Connecticut, that state having an enviable reputation in this respect.

Susanna was elated over the idea of company, and the

teacher at that. But Mrs. Dutton was sorely perplexed, for the house protruded its incompleteness on all possible occasions. It was absolutely necessary, however, if Susanna were to go to school, to board Mr. Catherwood for a month, her father having declared his money exhausted at present, and her own meagre income needing to go to meet the taxes on the farm.

The last week in September was sunny and breezy, but the cellar had been flooded so long that the downstairs bedroom, opening off the living-room, was as damp as a vault. It was a long, narrow, shady chamber, with one window giving on the apple orchard, and one on the highway. The locusts screened it from the morning sun, while the farther end of the room, like the cellar, was built into the side-hill. The damp scales of the white-washed walls told the story of its moisture and mildew. The fireplace, unused for months, smelt of soot, while the chimney was choked with the deserted nests of swallows. The bedding had the musty odor accumulating from long disuse. Altogether, what with its shut-up aspect, its dampness, the shade, and the high four-poster, the room seemed to the children a solemn, august place, eminently fitted for the awful majesty of a pedagogue. To the women, it offered poor hospitality; but, considering the nature of their family, it was their best, and it was accordingly cleaned and aired. The chimney was burned and swept down, and a fire kept lighted in the fireplace. The windows were left open night and day.

The week before school opened, Susanna and Janey spent most of their time there, slipping in from the orchard and turning somersaults on the feather ticks beaten up into huge balls and lying in puffy lightness on the bed. Often, the creaking of the ropes, the foundation and springs in one, would tell Mrs. Dutton their whereabouts, and she would hasten in to see the ancient bed trembling and to hear a general groaning, as if it were in the throes of dissolution. But each time she surprised the invaders, the sternness melted from her purpose and the fretfulness from her heart, and she turned back with a smile and a sigh. On Saturday, the first of October, all their fun ended; for the green paper shades were half-drawn, and everything assumed an air of grandeur. The stately bed was now surrounded by a

snowy valance, and the ponderous ticks of live-geese feathers shaken up and smoothed. A blue-and-white plaid counterpane was spread over the vast expanse, and their mother's lace-trimmed pillow-slips, fragrant with lavender, promised to invite Mr. Catherwood's learning to repose. A Bible and Psalm-book were laid on one corner of the high mahogany bureau with its small swivel-glass. There was a washstand with two shelves resting between severe-looking legs, the upper shelf with a hole in it into which the bowl fitted, and the lower one holding a tall pitcher highly ornamental in shape and coloring. A striped homespun carpet covered the floor. Fastened above the mantel was a bunch of peacock feathers. A turkey-wing, with which to brush the sparks and ashes back, lay on the hearth. The brass fire-dogs were piled with dried apple-wood and pine-cones. A pair of brass candlesticks, holding Celinda's best tallow dips, were placed as a finishing touch on either end of the mantel.

When all was completed, Mrs. Dutton stood in the middle of the room, giving everything a last look — Janey and Susanna also entering very seriously into the scrutiny.

Mr. Catherwood was to arrive that day, stopping over the Sabbath at Farmer Vroom's; but it was the understanding that on Monday his belongings were to be sent to the Duttons' and that he should accompany Susanna home from school.

Early in the afternoon, the child slipped away to the attic. The wasps, drowsy with the languor of old age, droned in and out. The flies, battered against the window-panes, bathed in the sunshine as if it were the fountain of life. The herbs gave forth their varied scents. A door at the back of the attic stood wide open, and thither Susanna went. The height to the copse of locusts below was not great. She looked down over their tops to the mountain road and beyond to a slope in multifarious bloom with ferns, huckleberry bushes, and a straggling growth of stunted cedars covered with aromatic berries soft with a purplish film and filling the autumn air with perfume. Beyond stretched the solemn forest as if its arms were lifted in prayer to the everlasting mountains, now radiantly, dazzlingly blue in the full

glory of the high unclouded sun, and alluring her ascending gaze with a fascination nameless but perpetual. Fancies, seldom taking form, hovered vaguely in her thought. Her responsive, ecstatic nature, expanding and thrilling with mysterious longing, glowed in the splendor of that wall of sapphire. She thought of those she loved, and loved them more. A Druidic fervor stole into possession of her faculties and senses; and, tiny as she was, in the presence of nature at once august and lovely, the priestess was in her mien, the expectancy of some annunciation in her face.

A stone rattling upon its fellows in the road drew her attention, a dreamy, listening smile still lingering about her mouth.

She saw a very young man, extremely slight and dressed in black, come into view. He had a firm, free, springing step, although occasionally stumbling on the pebbly, ledgy road, as if his eyes seldom followed his feet. His arms swung back and forth, maintaining a swaying balance for his body. His coat, cut in the fashion of the time, had two long pointed tails, and these, flapping with his rapid motion, made her think of a bird. As he came nearer, he kept looking at her, and when he was opposite, she curtsied to him with a demure respect which seemed to upset his gravity. He laughed a little, and she laughed back with a rippling gurgle as if her throat were a veritable Pan's flute.

"Who are you?" he inquired, coaxingly.

"I'm Susanna!" There was a radiant confidence in her face, as if her reply conveyed all possible information.

"Susanna!" He nodded two or three times, as one might, coming suddenly upon the living prototype of a rare painting he has long studied and admired.

"May you ever be as beautiful, as religious, and as spotless as the Babylonian Susanna—my little Susanna!" he concluded caressingly; and then, before what he recognized as a superior intelligence flashing from her countenance could find expression in a child's curious and baffling question, he inquired, "Is this Mrs. Dutton's?"

"Yes," she said, adding gratuitously and fondly, "She's my grandma."

He passed on, casting backward a smiling glance. Running to the window, she watched him eagerly and long-

ingly till she could see him take the path across the Storm meadow, through the hickories, and disappear in the broad stone house. She knew now who he was, and a sudden determination animated her.

She had attended school but one quarter; but, in that brief period, had received a vivid perception of a difference between the other little girls and herself which gave her an alien, lonely feeling. Her sociable heart was always trying to surmount the intangible barrier and her active brain to trace the cause of the disparagement besetting her conduct, her scholarship, and her clothing. It was a clear case of the power of the majority, for she never suspected that hers was the better way. The other girls had jeered at her white pantalets, much in evidence; theirs were of calico or nankeen. She must at least remove this salient obstacle to success, and surreptitiously, since her mother had called her a foolish little innocent and kissed her, sending her out to play when she had wept over her peculiarity.

It was a new pair of pantalets which called forth all her energy that golden September day; for, having found in an old trunk a resplendent piece of calico, spotted with pink and blue and yellow sprigs, she sat down on the landing of the staircase to sew. How fortunate her winter's practice on a sampler had proved! Unbuttoning one white leglet from the main garment just above her knee, she kept it before her as a pattern. The task proved an arduous one; but, just when the long shadows were beginning to send out creepers under the eaves, and a cool dampness to sweep in through the open door, she drew a long, happy breath. Her work was done. She would emerge from the forest on Monday, a triumphant fac-simile, in at least one respect, of the Hoovers, the Van Saans, and Neeltje Vroom. And the new teacher! Perhaps the pantalets would propitiate him also, although, she remembered, with a sigh of relief, the teacher of the previous winter had seldom found fault with her.

No ambitious youth, in those far-away days when honors and not athletics gave a man rank among his intellectual peers, thirsted more ardently for some auspicious occasion on which to show his parts than Susanna did for Monday. In fancy, she beheld herself a favorite and leader. To further her project, she decided, at judi-

cious moments, to exhibit inability to read or write or cipher; for was not Neeltje Vroom the stupidest girl in the school, and did not Neeltje name all the games to be played, and did not the other children daily bring her propitiatory offerings, such as colored eggs, dried chest-nuts, and fruit-cake? She thought of some preserved ginger-root sent to her great-grandfather in the spring. She would wrap a piece of this in many layers of paper to incite curiosity and take it to Neeltje.

The Dutton household was astir a whole hour earlier than usual on Monday morning; for Susanna's education had become an ever-recurring and anxious problem. Even Mr. Egerton Brereton was in his corner by the fireplace in the living-room when the child's face and hands received a final polishing.

"Mind, Susanna, to keep your eyes and ears open and improve your opportunity. The Breretons were a talented race, lovers of books. Lady Margaret Warburton spoke in three languages and wrote letters that Queen Anne Boleyn might have envied."

"Yes, grandpa," said the little girl, obediently.

"I've covered your books fresh for you, dear," said Mrs. Dutton, "and be careful not to drop them in the road and spoil them."

"No, grandma."

"Try to be a good girl, darling," said Mrs. Kildare, tying the strings of a white dimity sunbonnet under her chin. "Mind your teacher, don't quarrel, and don't bring any tales home."

"Tan't I doe to school?" asked Janey, wistfully, wondering at Susanna's importance and fearing her sister was going so far away she would never see her again.

"I'll bring you something home," and Susanna met her outstretched arms with a convulsive hug. Then, without explanation, whisking across the road to the wood-house where her oblation and the needlework of Saturday were concealed, she hid them about her person, returning just in time to receive Nicholas Storm, who had agreed to stop for her.

He looked awkward and uncomfortable; for his clothes, made out of his father's, were an ill fit, stained and yellowed with wear and time. His trousers, short and scant, and revealing his ankles, were a golden butternut-brown.

His jacket was a rich plum color, shading in places into lavender where the light had most transformed the original hue. A big straw hat covered his bushy hair, cut half short on his neck. As the weather continued warm, he was barefoot.

There was a large protection in his blue eyes, and the smile with which he greeted the small maid was attractive and affectionate. He carried a tin dinner-pail in one hand, and an atlas and "Town's Speller and Defin'er" under his arm, keeping the other hand free in anticipation of Susanna's confiding palm.

"Take good care of my little girl, Nick," said Mrs. Kildare, watching them depart.

"Yes'm," looking into her eyes with an honest, veracious glance.

"And come home just as soon as school is out, my child."

"Yes'm," with the exact tone and accent of Nicholas.

They walked off in silence, going up the mountain road and passing the orchard and the three-corner lot, coming to the pasture-lot, the termination of the Kildare farm in this direction. Half the pasture-lot was a grove of venerable pines and half a stony field interspersed with meadowy hollows where the grass grew luxuriantly. The two cows which Mrs. Dutton had milked early that morning lifted up a mild and ruminating gaze from under the pines, for the day was one of summer warmth and stillness. The great trees and the gentle dignity of the animals to more enlightened, but not less sensitive, natures than those of that country boy and girl might have suggested Dodonian groves; as it was, Nicholas and Susanna lingered to feed the cows tufts of the long, sweet grass growing outside their enclosure.

"Let me carry your blicky," said Nicholas, hearing her sigh.

She handed him her dinner-pail.

"Let me take your books, too."

She as readily yielded the tomes of learning clasped against her breast.

They turned into a foot-path leading through the forest. Here the lateness of the season made itself felt. The crickets chirped in lonesome, crooning tones. The leaves sifted down as if performing a sentient, graceful dance. The chipmunks and squirrels hastened from

branch to branch, as if behindhand with their hoarding. A breeze sprang up, sweeping fitfully through the trees with a lingering, sobbing cadence.

It may have been these quieting influences which gave Nicholas and Susanna a serious aspect, as if they were walking to church. They had no special thoughts; they were unconsciously taking part in a communion as tenderly embracing as an apostolic benediction. They were receiving a blessing which would return to them with gracious plenty in the storm and stress of life.

When they were nearly through the woods, Susanna stopped and, looking at Nicholas shyly but triumphantly, tied the calico "bottoms" above her knees. When this fantastic addition to her costume was completed, she walked backward, a wistful query in her uplifted eyes.

He had set the books and dinner-pails on the ground, and was regarding her with a protecting, solicitous air.

"Does I look like other girls?"

He slowly shook his head. "Your purty white bunnit and them things don't jibe, Susanna. I'd take 'em off."

She began to sob a little.

"Wear 'em if you want to—only, I like the white ones better. I felt es ef I wus a-walkin' with a leetle lady all the way through the woods," he said apologetically. "I like you 'cause you are so diff'rent."

"You don't know, Nick, you don't know what it is to be different. The girls make fun of me for wearing white panties. I made these myself."

A furtive humor crept into his glance as he noticed their uneven length and general crookedness.

"Well," he said, after a very perceptible pause, "I b'lieve you'd better keep 'em on. You jes' let me know ef them gurls make fun agin. It's Neeltje Vroom, isn't it?"

"Catalyntje Van Saan, too!"

"I'll lick the hull lot of 'em, I will, ef they don't take keer. We'll be late ef we don't hurry." Picking up the pails and tucking the books under his arm, he held his other big, bony, sunburned hand out to the child in a gentle, paternal manner, and they hastened on.

The schoolhouse was a log cabin standing on the edge of a clearing and looked like the advance-guard of civilization. North and west the primeval forest stretched for miles over the mountains. In front was the play-

ground, from which was visible a gradually descending vista of highly cultivated land dotted as far as the eyes could reach with low spreading stone houses and clusters of immense red barns.

As they came into sight, a herd of fifty boys and girls, weaving in and out like flies, greeted them with a whoop. Some advanced to meet them, while a flock led by Neeltje Vroom burst into yells of derisive laughter on obtaining a near view of Susanna.

Neeltje was a big, fat girl with black eyes and hair, and a full, saucy, florid face. She was the beauty of the neighborhood. In vain had Susanna the previous winter emulated her in every possible way. The more conciliating she had been, the more domineering was Neeltje, fostering a kind of feudal hate among her companions towards the little alien.

Susanna stood dumfounded over the failure of a scheme so arduously projected and completed. Presently, with a stifled gasp, she began to fumble in her pocket, and slowly drawing forth her offering, presented it with something of the mute obsequiousness of a heathen endeavoring to propitiate a fetish.

Neeltje accepted the parcel tentatively, the entire school ranging themselves on either side with the stolid curiosity of spectators at a bull-fight.

"It ain't nothin'," she said, unwinding two or three wrappings which fluttered to the ground. "It ain't nothin' but paper. You're a-tryin' to fool me! Take thet!" and she flung the gift at Susanna.

A sudden, absolute anger blazed in the child's face. She picked up her slighted overture. She trembled from head to foot, though not with fear. The war of race burns in children with consuming fury when once ignited. She remembered all her grandfather had told her. She recalled what Nicholas had said in the woods. She saw Peter offering her the wormy cherries. Neeltje Vroom and Peter Vroom were henceforth her inferiors.

"I s'pose you don't know any better, Neeltje Vroom. I've 'shamed for you!" And then—without warning, even to herself—and as if impelled by a primitive, uncontrollable impulse, she sprang at Neeltje, pulling her black hair with all the energy of outraged amity.

"O Susanna, you're not a lady now!" and Nicholas

seized the slender, trembling arm, about to make another assault. "I didn't think you'd ever do sech a thing! But it served you right, Neeltje Vroom, all the same. A big gurl like you forever tantalin' a little one. It's past bearin', and I hope we've got a new teacher thet'll spare no lickin's on you, I do!"

"Look out what you're 'bout, Nick Storm," and Peter started forward. "It wouldn't a hurt to a let the two gurls fit it out. You've spiled the fun! It's no fair."

A murmur of assent buzzed through the crowd.

"She's a spiteful leetle huzzy, she is," said Neeltje. "I always knowed it," glancing at Susanna. "Whar'd you git them panties? One's ever so much shorter than t'other. Got your granny's nightcap on, ain't you?" and she broke into a loud laugh in which Catalyntje Van Saan boisterously joined.

Nicholas strode up to Neeltje, clamping one hand over her mouth, while holding the nape of her neck by the other.

"Run into the schoolhouse, Susanna. 'Tain't no place fer you."

But Susanna held her ground, tightly grasping the ginger-root.

Peter now struck Nicholas, sending him reeling back.

"Go it! Go it! Hurrah fer Pete Vroom!" cried a chorus of excited voices. "You served her right fer foolin' you, you did, Neeltje. Don't yer give in. See the granny's nightcap! Hi, hi! He, he!"

Nicholas put his arm around Susanna. "She's a lady, she is, — I mean she was a lady, — and thet you'll never be, Neeltje Vroom, ef you live ferever. I'll show you, too, thet Susanna meant fair by you; but ef she ever goes a step out of her way fer you agin, onct she's begged your pardon, fer fergettin' she's a lady, and you ain't! I'll think less of her. Beg her pardon fer pullin' her hair, Susanna, and then you'll be quits."

Susanna twirled irresolutely on one foot.

"Do it, and have it over with," commanded Nicholas.

"Scuse me, Neeltje, for pulling your hair."

"No, I won't! I won't never scuse you!"

"Now you're a lady agin, Susanna. Don't mind what she says. She don't know no better, Neeltje Vroom don't. She always wus a blockhead about her studies,

and she's too much of a blockhead to know paper from sweeties. Give me thet, and I'll show her."

The boys and girls pressed near, watching the process of unwinding as if it were a game. At length, the ginger-root, crusted with sugar, appeared.

A hum of voices began.

"Nick was right. The Vrooms always aire huffy es tinder." "It wus mean in sech a big gal to tease a little one."

Neeltje looked sullenly around, drawing her disordered braids over her shoulders meanwhile and replaiting them.

"Gimme a taste, Nick," cried a hungry voice.

The ginger-root was now divided infinitesimally, eliciting much comment, favorable and unfavorable. Susanna, feeling that at last she had exhibited one proprietary right, became smiling and confident.

At this juncture, a graphic silence fell upon the little company. Mr. Catherwood issued from the forest. He said good morning, right and left, dexterously gaining the centre of the crowd, and bestowing on Susanna the same bright, caressing smile she had received on Saturday.

Nicholas still held a remnant of the ginger-root.

"What have you there?" he inquired, smiling reassuringly and invitingly.

"The leetle gurl'll tell you. We ain't none of us ever tasted it before. She brought it to Neeltje Vroom, 'cause she wanted to be friends. This ere piece is Neeltje's. Can I give it to teacher, Neeltje?"

Awed and relieved by this stroke of diplomacy, which saved her from disgrace, she murmured, "Yes."

Mr. Catherwood made a solemn show of tasting the root.

"You have a great delicacy here," he exclaimed. "*Ginger orientalis!*" he continued, tasting it again. "It comes from China and is a costly luxury, found only on the tables of the wealthy. Where did you get it, Susanna?"

"It comed to grandpa from a sea-captain. He brought it, grandpa said, 'way 'cross the Indian Ocean and round the Cape of Good Hope and 'cross the Atlantic. Grandma'll give you some more."

"Susanna must love you very dearly, Neeltje, to bring you such a dainty. I dare say I know the reason. You

have been good and kind to her, because you are such a big girl and she is such a tiny one. A fine example, boys and girls. Whenever a big fellow is mean to a small one, and an older girl to a younger one, set them down for cowards."

Ezekiel Van Tassel put his hand over his mouth to conceal a grin, turning up the whites of his eyes. Susanna set her lips together, choking down an expostulation and glancing feelingly at Nicholas. A jealous pang shot through twenty emulous hearts lest Neeltje Vroom, under false colors, should prove Mr. Catherwood's favorite. But the *esprit de corps* was strong enough for the sturdy Knickerbockers to maintain silence.

"It is time to open school. Let us go in and have prayers." Mr. Catherwood led the way. Neeltje fell behind, joining Susanna. "You won't tell him, will you, when he goes to your house?"

The child looked up with a discerning eye, but a generous purpose. "No," she said.

"Will you skip rope with me, recess?" continued Neeltje, in a wheedling tone.

Susanna nodded indulgently. Triumph was in her mien and peace in her heart, as she hung the white sun-bonnet among its associates of hybrid color. There was a comical, fantastic dignity in her step, heightened by the brilliant and poorly made pantalets, as she took her seat on the long bench in front of the desks allotted to the older pupils.

The first day with the new master was full of statecraft and diplomacy, for the task of primary importance in a district school is not scholarship, but leadership. There is always a handful of recalcitrant boys and mischievous girls whose rank among themselves depends on ability to test the mettle of an instructor. On that October morning, there was no lack of invitation. The mask of bashful artlessness which veiled the various physiognomies was half real, half simulated, the bashfulness being real and the artlessness simply preliminary. If the bashfulness could be made to preponderate, the victory, that day at least, would be Mr. Catherwood's.

While every head was ostensibly bowed in prayer, there were at least a dozen pairs of eyes taking a critical survey of the chief actor in the scene. His clothes, his

boots, his outstretched hands clenching either side of the desk, the color of his hair, whether his eyes were really closed, the tones of his voice, and the peaceful or warlike nature of his invocation were weighed in the balance.

The prayer completed, Peter Vroom, Ezekiel Van Tassel, and others glanced back and forth with blank expressions, but really to see who would take the initiative. It was soon apparent that the issue was sufficiently doubtful, in their own estimation, for an early trial of parts.

Mr. Catherwood made no introductory address. He called up one set after another, solely on the basis of height, and making them show their mental paces with alarming rapidity. Some of the ringleaders in former rebellions were soon at a discount in reading and geography. When Peter Vroom said the Mountains of the Moon were in the sun, with an insulting challenge of voice and manner, he was pointed to his seat. He sauntered away, snapping a "spitball" against the ceiling.

"Walk back, sir."

He turned his head indolently and nonchalantly, continuing on his way, but the teacher followed, collaring him and marching him to the platform. The majority regarded the situation with the grim taciturnity of Indians, but awaiting with intense interest their companion's next move.

Apparently Catherwood had forgotten Peter, who now made more balls, a titter escaping one observer and then another, as their composition progressed. When they were finished, he began snapping them at Mr. Catherwood, who continued the examination, notwithstanding his hair and back were fast assuming a knobby appearance. When the hilarity had reached a pitch that showed the little girls with aprons stuffed in wads against their mouths, and the older ones casting eyes at the boys in a way to nag them on, and Peter's cronies taking from their pockets other handfuls of the balls, while nudging one another and furtively displaying them, the master wheeled round suddenly, a big, open-mouthed ink-bottle in hand, and dashed the entire contents in Peter's face. A roar of approval followed. Seizing the discomfited boy by the collar and pushing him towards the door, while cuffing him at every step, he hurled him outside.

A profound silence greeted his return. An ultra meek-

ness crept into every voice, and the morning session finished with a general silent verdict in his favor.

In the afternoon a thunder shower, growing out of the mild and belated condition of the weather, having freshened the atmosphere, and the time now being ripe for the customary oration, books were ordered put away, and Catherwood faced his respectful audience.

There was a look of premature gravity on his boyish countenance which bore the marks of the old-fashioned scholar. His cheeks were pale and hollow. The line of his chin was clean-cut, powerful, but emaciated. His eyes shone with a steady, sober glow both of intellect and spirit. Otherwise there was a serene mildness about his personality, very beguiling and deceptive and attractive. His high, full forehead showed a streak of white against the sunburned skin, meeting heavy, arched brows, while his hair, fine, abundant, and slightly curling, was brushed back in a disordered mass. A man of thirty in maturity; though barely twenty in years, he exhibited the evidences of that homogeneousness in ancestry characteristic of the first five or six generations of Americans in New England, as well as the tense conditions of their existence. Every gesture had a forceful calmness; the tones of his voice were measured; there was precision, almost ornateness, about his phraseology, while his accent, elegant and resonant, filled Susanna with delight, for here, at last, was some one who talked like her people.

There was no allusion in the familiar talk to the affair with Peter. There were some direct statements about the virtue of hickory rods, but many more about fair play, vulgarity, and the stuff out of which good citizens are made. The address, after the fashion of the time, was directed wholly to the boys, and was a fetching appeal to their pride and honor. The girls, accustomed like hens to choose their own pickings, made selections, as temperament or conscience dictated, appearing from a kind of obedient womanliness of expression to be finding much that was worthy of approval.

After the lecture, the entire school was marshalled in a spelling-class, called "choosing sides." Nicholas Storm and Polly Frommervelt were appointed "choosers."

When Nicholas, after looking over his companions with assorting discrimination, let his eyes rest on Susanna and

called her name in a loud, clear voice, she could hardly believe in the reality of her great honor. Mincing her way with a kind of excessive propriety to the proud position beside him of "first choice," she looked up to him with a reverent confidence very touching to see. Her heart was swelling with exultation, for she had already been pronounced an excellent reader for her age. Should she be able to meet this test as well?

The spelling began with fine spirit, Susanna becoming brilliantly conspicuous, when, after the tenth failure, alternately on one side and the other, during which the forces were mowed down with the fierce ruthlessness of the Asiatic plague, she spelled *almond*. A second victory won by *phthisis* left her one of twelve remaining victors. *Ecstasy* proved her Waterloo.

She walked disconsolately back to her seat, a tear meandering down her cheek. But pretty soon her heartache was forgotten in witnessing the triumph of Nicholas, who was left standing alone, the champion speller of "School No. 9."

A few minutes later, the pupils were dismissed. Nicholas and Susanna lingered while Mr. Catherwood locked up, the key being hidden in its customary place under the huge flag in front of the door.

The sun hung cloudlessly, dazzlingly low over the mountains. The shower had brought a fall of temperature, and a frosty sharpness pervaded the atmosphere. A sounding wind shook the tree-tops. Below the hill, the last group of boys and girls sauntered home, the sun flashing against their tin dinner-pails, the wind wafting back their voices. The teacher paused a minute to view the scene as if taking in some new and deep impression of his position.

Then the trio started to the woods with sturdy, rapid steps. There the lights as well as the shadows had grown solemn, and the autumn gale filled the vistas with fantastic whispers. The rain still dripped from the trees, while the path, mossy in places, was spongy and wet. The farther they advanced, the more saturated the soil became, and Susanna began to get tired.

Nicholas, long ago, had taken her books and pail.

Noticing her lagging step, the young teacher stooped and telling her to spring on, carried her picka-back until they came out on the mountain road. A short distance

above the point of their descent was the Vroom homestead in the midst of a meadow plateau making an enviable and extensive farm, though isolated and grim in its situation, as the forest enclosed it on every side. Where the path met the road, they saw Peter. His manner was apprehensive and solicitous.

"Well, Peter, are you ready to do your duty in future?" asked Mr. Catherwood, laying his hand kindly on the boy's shoulder.

"Yes, sir," replied Peter, who had washed the boldest topographical marks from his face, though still bearing a somewhat beclouded aspect. "Say, Mr. Catherwood, please don't tell paa."

"Why not?"

"'Cause he'll lick me."

"What are you going to do about this?" pointing to his inky shirt.

"That ain't nothin'. They'll think I studied hard," and he looked up with a smile appreciative of the humor of such an idea.

"I won't report, as long as you behave yourself; at the same time, I advise you to tell no lies about the ink. Good night.—Come, children, let us join hands and run down the hill a bit."

The shales rattled under their feet while Susanna, swung between her protectors, performed a kind of airy flight, intoxicating and exhilarating. They fled past the pasture, the three-corner lot, and the orchard, only slackening their pace when the clump of locusts was reached. Here Nicholas parted company with his companions, who, rounding the angle formed by the shrubbery, came to the flight of steps leading to the yard on which the parlor opened.

The child flushed with pleasure when she beheld the group assembled there to greet Mr. Catherwood. To her, they composed a vivid, splendid picture.

Old Egerton Brereton had donned a ruffled shirt and stood just outside the door, leaning on a gold-headed cane. Janey was in her best blue frock and white apron. Mrs. Kildare, in a silk dress of antique design, looked half as large again in her leg-o'-mutton sleeves and full, surplice waist. Though Mrs. Dutton's black gown shone with wear, she had crossed a berth of lace over her

bosom and covered her thin gray hair with a cap, these adornments giving her in Susanna's eyes an august dignity.

Louis Catherwood, late of Northampton, and graduated from Harvard, and whose ablutions that morning had of necessity been performed in a tin wash-basin outside the Vroom kitchen door, drew a sigh of relief at the unexpected apparition, and assuming his best manner, received his welcome with a fine courtesy and breeding not lost on the imitative children.

CHAPTER VII

ALTHOUGH one has never known, from a wide comparison, the meaning of the word "luxury," or consciously recognized an effective appeal to his sensuous nature, or lingered, while defining the limit of his susceptibility and enjoyment, in the realm of the æsthetic, he may, notwithstanding, be under the intoxication to be imbibed when conditions defined by these three terms exist.

In such a state was our little Susanna, while Mrs. Dutton and Celinda, on that memorable first day of school, were preparing tea. The last rays of the sun had disappeared behind the mountains, and the living-room was growing sombre although it was only five o'clock. But the heavy rafters caught the ruddy glow from the huge bed of coals on the deep hearth and shone with the richness of mahogany. A tea-kettle stood on the outskirts of the coals, and it sang as if a chorus of crickets were imprisoned in its bellying sides. A sedate, well-conditioned cat sat on the hearth, its whiskers etched against the reddish darkness of the room, feline suavity and dignity in the furrows of its retreating brow, and a feminine softness and voluptuousness in its full curves, rising and falling as its purring swelled in unison with comfortable sounds and movements. Sancho sat on his haunches on the other side, his glossy, curling hair shining like cannel-coal, and his long, silky, crinkled ears giving his gentle, alert face an expression like that of Mrs. Browning's embedded in her curls.

Celinda had taken down the door of the outside oven, and from the roomy aperture rushed forth a warm atmosphere laden with scents as varied and sweet as those of Hymettus, for the baking of that day had been of no mean dimensions; the broad surface of the oven was covered with cakes and pies, a pudding and biscuits, and the

semi-weekly bread-baking. It was a rare occasion, and the plenty and variety gave the child a largeness of physical comfort she had usually only felt when in Mrs. Storm's cellar, or while watching the contents of Neeltje Vroom's dinner-pail spread out at school.

Mrs. Dutton laid a tablecloth, the border of which, opposite the fire, displayed scrolls and ferns, roses and lilies, in sumptuous, white confusion. And now Sussanna's heart swelled, for at this juncture Mrs. Kildare entered carrying a silver tray with a full tea-service. The vision brought an impression of solemnity and grandeur, like that of the communion service to the modern child; for the silver never appeared except on those rare occasions when some minister stopped with them over night. Beside it on the table were piled the thin, flaring, china cups covered with embossed blue figures of the color of the corn-flower, and seeming to breathe the true aroma of the Celestial empire.

Mr. Catherwood's door had been closed, but it was now opened; usually, it revealed an interior blank and dark at this hour and emitting, in cold weather, a perfume of dried apples, cherries, and other winter fruit placed there for convenient use. Now, how different! The fire was in full blaze, and the ceiling enlivened with fantastic, cheerful shadows. The candlesticks stood beside each other on a small, bare table, their light falling upon an open book.

The young man paused in the doorway, a fear of intrusion on his countenance, his black, slim figure filling the space like a full-length portrait.

Janey sat gently swaying back and forth in her rocker, the color of the wild rose in her cheeks, and a sweet, infantile invitation and timidity in her face. He held out his hands. She ran to him and he took her in his arms, her blue frock silhouetting his black coat, and her slender legs in their mixed red and white yarn stockings held by his long, white hand as he walked towards the fire.

"Come right in and be one of the family whenever you feel like it, Mr. Catherwood. We want ours to be a home to you as far as a New England man can feel at home in this region."

"Thank you, Mrs. Dutton. I had an idea while I was

studying in my comfortable chamber that I was back in Northampton. I am very happy and proud to be one of you. Did this pet fly straight down from heaven?" and, like a young father, he glanced at Janey with youthful fondness and impressionability.

A faint sigh fell on his ears. He looked at Mrs. Kildare and then back at the child, whose etherealness seemed to breathe into his very being a haunting quality. He stroked her head caressingly, and she nestled into his neck, softly patting his cheeks. Sitting down in a big, wooden armchair, he put her on his knee. Susanna drew near, leaning on the high back. "Will you tell us a story after supper?" she asked, shyly.

"Come, come, Susanna! Mr. Catherwood is tired, and little girls should be seen and not heard," said Mrs. Dutton.

"I'm not too tired to tell them a story to-night and every night while I am here."

"You are very kind," said Mrs. Kildare, "but you must not let them impose on you."

"No danger. First tea, then the story, then to bed. Shall that be the way of it?"

Susanna looked irresolute.

"What is it?" He lifted her chin.

"Grandpa said when you comed — perhaps — you'd lead us in prayer, just as papa did."

A flush crept over his face, suffusing it from chin to forehead. Here was an unexpected ordeal. Mrs. Dutton had paused, a plate of butter in her hand, an anxious longing on her face. Celinda was lighting the fluid lamps, and she too turned towards him, one in either hand, her black skin and the pewter of the lamps making her appear like a character from the "Arabian Nights."

"Shall I, Janey?" he asked, laying his face on her head to hide a momentary confusion.

The young teacher retired early that night; he had slept little while at the Vrooms', the stuffy, catacomb-like atmosphere of their best chamber not having been modified by a fire. The comfort, but chiefly the companionship of his new abode, brought about a pleasant reaction, and a deep soporific peace pervaded his senses. Extinguishing his candles, he looked out over the upward

slope of the orchard. There was a full moon, and the apple trees cut great circles of shadow on the grass glistening with a hoar frost. The cascades of the creek made a monotonous, purring rumble. A solitary cricket crooned a threnody. The intense repose, the purity of the air, the thin foliage of the locusts, casting dashes of lozenge-shaped filagree on the chalk-like whiteness of the road, exhilarated his natural dignity and gravity. The scene was in harmony with his effort, an hour before, to give formal expression in prayer of his thought of God and his reliance on a benignant Providence. In this attenuated and silvery aspect of Nature, he drew near to her by a power superlative to the senses and met beauty in its essence. It seemed to him, if he could hush his being into perfect, acquiescent stillness, he might receive communications that would lift him out of the body. But there is a fiat which limits the most subtle æsthetic capacity and this tense condition of expectancy suddenly vanished.

Early the next morning, while dreaming that he was slipping down from a great height into a tropical valley, and that rose leaves choked his breath and speech, he awoke to a frosty coolness in the room, a round little pair of arms clasping his neck, and a velvety cheek laid against his own. It was Janey. She had crept downstairs thus early, and while hugging her new friend had fallen asleep.

She lay outside the covering, her night-clothes a scant protection from the chilly air. Afraid the child had taken cold, he gently disengaged her arms and, placing her in his own warm nest, dressed hurriedly and summoned her mother. When Mrs. Kildare came, she found Janey awake and apparently none the worse for this pilgrimage of love. But, towards night, the gentle little thing developed a fever which, passing away in a day or two, left her with a dry cough. A week later, the delicate color had faded from her cheeks and the rounded contour of her wrists and chin was gone.

Meanwhile, Susanna made fine progress at school. Sympathy and commendation turned her into a greedy book-worm. She would stand erect, a happy alertness in every feature, and as anxious to pounce upon each question as a robin on the early worm. The ride picka-

back had become a daily episode, while Nicholas carried her books and pail, a faithful knight-errant. As Janey's indisposition, a nameless lassitude and weakness, continued, Susanna, thrown more and more on her own resources, very often fell into mischief.

The second week of the quarter had drawn to a close, and the ride home had proved more than usually hilarious. With her spirits keyed to the highest pitch, she stood idly by the barn-gate, gazing longingly up and down the road. Eben Van Tassel had already returned from the wharves, so no stolen ride on his buckboard was to be expected. The white turnpike was deserted except for a trio of cows driven by a girl. They were a long distance off, but in that dry mountain air every detail was distinctly visible. She watched their slow approach with a growing impatience. The cows now and then switched their tails with a lasso movement. One bellowed hungrily. The girl plodded beside them, a colorless, faded, meagre shape, her face hidden in a sunbonnet with a huge crown.

There was a squash in a decaying state of mellowness lying at Susanna's feet.

The cows ambled slowly by, dropping into file as they passed, and turning on her their big, brown, motherly eyes. The girl, too, looked at her out of a freckled face and vacant, expressionless eyes. She kicked up the dust with each clumsy, slouching step, trailing her birch switch and sending up a thread of additional dust.

A great impatience filled Susanna's nervous, agile mind. She longed to prod the animals into more rapid motion. She burned to quicken the girl's listless pace. She felt a growing revolt against a picture so subdued and lifeless. The rear view was more provocative than the forward one. The girl was a disfiguring patch on the glow of that October splendor. The very wind said hurry, hurry, hurry. There lay the squash, and there, like a target against the blue sky, was the crown of the sunbonnet. She looked first at one, then at the other. No, she could not be so mean!—but oh!—if she did! what a start it would give the girl, and then the girl would flick the cows—and how they would all run! She would just throw it after them, not at them. She lifted it cautiously, straightening herself. There was

the crown — the one thing visible now — filling the universe! She might hit it; but she would not try to. Away went the squash like a small sun hurled out of its orbit. On it rushed, a burst of color, towards that slowly moving drab circle. It entered it, like a shot the bull's-eye, and there was a scintillation of glory about the startled girl.

She turned, shook her switch at Susanna, and screamed, "I'll tell my paa, I will, and he'll tell your maa, he will!"

Susanna fell into a state of shame. She had driven herself out of her Garden of Eden. She hoped the girl would tell. And Mr. Catherwood would have to know — of course! Disgrace must be wiped out by disgrace. But how had she happened to do it? — and yet, how good it was to see the cows careening madly along, their bells making a furious jingle, and the girl running at the top of her speed. She burst out laughing.

Mrs. Dutton, hearing the unwonted chime, came to the door. A glance told her the story.

"Susanna Vere Kildare, come here! Come here this minute!"

Susanna obeyed.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself! I never thought it of you — never! Go right up-stairs to bed — and stay there till morning. Not a morsel of supper shall you have — and don't stop in your mother's room to disturb her. She is getting Janey to sleep."

Mr. Catherwood had witnessed the episode also. He understood the youthful spirit of resistance to the eternal calmness and recurrence of events and actions, — yea, even to the exasperating fixity of inanimate things in an isolated country district. He, too, felt fierce reactions. But he could leave it all. His stay under the shadow of those mountains was but a means to an end. How would it be with this ardent girl a few years later? What temptations would the monotony put in her path? What powers of resistance and revulsion would she have?

He sauntered out of doors, up the steps leading to the roof-garden, and into the parlor, the door of which Susanna had left ajar. It was empty. He went to the attic staircase and peeped up. There she stood, gazing

out of the window. The tears were running down her cheeks. She brushed them away, leaving black smudges. Then she smiled, and then a heavy sigh tore her little frame as she began to slowly unbutton her frock.

He opened the stair door wider and, stepping inside, closed it after him. She watched him ascend with a feeling of mingled fear and delight.

Sitting down on the top step, he drew her beside him, holding her there with his arm.

"You forgot you were a little lady, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir," and a dry sob escaped.

"And you forgot that poor girl probably doesn't have lean-tos named Whitehall built for her, or books to read, or—or a sister to play with—didn't you?"

"I didn't forget, Mr. Catherwood,—it was Satan. But I should think God would keep him shut up more. He's always after me on Fridays—and I think he's mean—and I think God's mean."

"But you don't think Susanna's mean, do you? What did God give her a mind or a heart or a will for? For no other reason than to reveal to her the way to escape Satan. Just show him after this that he can't outwit you even on Fridays. I'll tell you a secret," and the young moralist whispered in her ear: "He comes after me on Saturdays and Sundays, and sometimes he gives me a terrible chase."

"Oh! did he ever catch you?"

"Several times. So far, though, I have gotten away, always."

"I've never seen him yet, Mr. Catherwood. I've stayed awake nights, too. I would like to see his horns so much. Are they like cows' horns, do you think?" with some anxiety. If they were, an ugly situation might ensue. Perhaps, if they were, he might have been hiding in one of those cows the girl was driving.

"I'll tell you what I think. I don't believe Satan ever let himself be seen by people who can read and write. He couldn't frighten them that way. But he lets them know he's around by their feelings."

She nodded appreciatively.

"But whether people see him or not, there is one thing certain. If he forces them into devilish acts, there is nothing for them to do but to take such acts out of the

way. You must make it up with that girl the next time she comes along."

"Ask her to scuse me?" she inquired piteously. "Nobody ever asks me to scuse them."

"Never mind. Do your duty!" His voice was stern, for he was adjuring his own conscience over her shoulders. "Ask her to excuse you, and make some sacrifice for her besides. Haven't you something you think she would like?"

"Chestnuts, I s'pose. But she steals ours, and I don't think she ought to have any."

"The very thing. I'll get up and climb your tree early, and thrash a quart for her. When she comes driving the cows home to-morrow night, you can give them to her."

As the big chestnut tree on the upper edge of the orchard was the only one on the farm, this atonement seemed to Susanna not only tangible, but munificent.

"There's something else."

"What?" she asked wonderingly.

"Make it right with God before you go to sleep, will you?"

She hung her head. Usually the Lord and she were on very good terms; but she had never had a sin of such gigantic proportions to lay before him.

"I can't have any supper," she whispered. "Grandma's sent me to bed."

"Well, I think she did right, don't you?"

She nodded; she had, indeed, obeyed so meekly because she had felt the justice of her punishment.

Mr. Catherwood walked backward down the stairs, smiling at her all the way. As soon as the door was shut, she flung herself on her knees before the window and, like Daniel, prayed aloud with a mighty voice. The burden of her petition fell upon the young man's ears as he stood within the door below.

"O God, please keep Satan far away next Friday. Don't let him catch Mr. Catherwood or Nicholas or me. O God, try to keep your eyes wide open so as to see what he's about. And don't ever, ever, let any more squashes grow. I never want to see another. Forgive me for throwing the squash. Why, O God, did you let it hit the sunbonnet? If I ever do throw another one, please

don't let it hit. O God, make Janey well. I want somebody to play with. If you hadn't made Janey sick, perhaps I wouldn't have thrown the squash. Give my love to my dear papa in heaven. It isn't nice, God, not to have a papa. Bless mamma, and grandma, and grandpa. And let grandma bring me up just one glass of milk before it gets awful dark. Somebody tooked the pie and cake from my dinner-pail to-day and I'm pretty hungry. If grandma brings me up the milk, dear God, I'll know you love me. Watch out for Satan, and don't let him s'prise Mr. Catherwood to-morrow. Don't let him s'prise me. Don't let him s'prise anybody!" The prayer rose in fervor as it proceeded, until the all saints' or all sinners' petition at the close rent the air with a genuine thrill of rhapsodical emotion.

Then the attic became very still.

Just as the shadows from the eaves on either side had met in the middle, and while Susanna still lay awake pondering on the law and sin and atonement, she heard a familiar, groping step on the stairs, and pretty soon a tremulous voice inquiring, "Are you awake, dear?"

"Yes, grandma."

"Here's a glass of milk."

She drank the milk silently.

"Now go to sleep," and the old lady gave her many tuckings and pattings. "Good night."

"Good night, grandma." •

"Pleasant dreams, grandma," called the childish treble across the darkness.

CHAPTER VIII

ALTHOUGH the episode of the ginger-root had permanently altered Susanna's relations to Neeltje, it had not produced that animosity in Neeltje which would have been the natural result had she been a few years older. Neeltje simply changed places with the younger girl, who now became the leader in the exact ratio of her intellectual and moral supremacy. Susanna had risen, too, in Peter's estimation; but, after all, the ultimate reason of this excess of cordiality was their recognition of Mr. Catherwood's interest in her.

Ministers and teachers were accepted by the sturdy, shrewd, literal Dutch as a class appointed to give spiritual advice, train the morals, shrive the dying, and instruct boys, especially, in the rudiments of religion and knowledge. If a minister were not available, a teacher would often supply his place on Sundays or at the bedside of the sick. Outside of their particular province, their opinion was worth rather less than more on matters pertaining to buying and selling, stock-raising and farming; but, let some question of casuistry stir the sluggish brains of these worldly men, it was set aside till the minister came; or, if some new pronouncement crept into the district, or some rumor of political change or agitation gained volume, no decision was permitted till the teacher had given his verdict. The teacher's estimate of a boy's brains or conduct was final. The minister's fiat on salvation and damnation, on the privileges of men and the duties of women, on the baptism of infants and the age for confirmation, was absolute. There was no appeal; there were no mental reservations. In their respective domains, minister and teacher were regents.

In Mr. Catherwood's time, therefore, Susanna was safe

from the tyranny of the Vroom children; they never forgot, however, that her family was foreign to Dutch ways of thinking and doing, and that if more clever in school than they, they were astute and shrewd as she was not. They had a kind of brute respect for her compunctions and generous impulses, for the magnificent way in which she would yield a situation or share an opportunity; but, at the same time, they thought her a great fool and had a tacit understanding with each other to take all they could get and give as little as possible in return. She loved to give; they were eager to receive. She loved to be the story-teller; they liked to rest their solid cheeks on their more solid fists and sit heavily and with some wonder gazing at her while she reeled off fairy-tales or moral lessons. But when it came to physical action, it was altogether different. Neeltje never would admit that her little friend could make as straight a hem, or narrow off the toe of a stocking, or sew patchwork as well as she could; declaring that if Susanna lived to be as old as Methuselah, these things, by virtue of her not being a Dutch girl, she would never be able to do superlatively well. And Peter, while glad to stand next her in school although several years his junior, and have her whisper the right answer and cover his mental dulness, never would admit that under any circumstances she could learn to smoke a grape vine herself, or kill a snake with one telling blow, or whittle a pencil symmetrically. But as long as the Vrooms would tell her that she knew as much as some teachers, or get her to mount a stone and preach and assure her they liked to hear her better than a minister, she was usually content to allow them what in her heart she considered a supremacy in some way connected with inferiority. Perhaps half the peaceable living in the world is due to the fact that so many men and women go their way hugging their conceits with such tenacity.

It happened not infrequently that the Vrooms put her in situations they would not fill themselves; but if she perceived it, she did not care, for there was a fundamental love of variety in her nature and a dangerous facility of obligingness.

As the child could not lead an absolutely solitary life, and as the Vrooms were, except the Storms, the Duttons'

nearest neighbors, she saw a great deal of them the autumn she was nine years old.

There had been a furious storm, swelling the creek to angry proportions and washing the mountain road so free from its top soil that the bowlders stood up like bony shoulders and the shales and pebbles crowded together as thickly as shingles.

Susanna had recently learned to drive the cows to pasture. The morning after the storm and while she was busy trying to force them to bolt in under the pines, a loud hallo made her look up.

Peter was advancing with a diminutive buckboard attached to a yoke of oxen. "I'm comin' to give you a ride," he shouted, flipping the oxen with a long, braided leather thong fastened in a hole bored in the end of a stick. "Where you ben all the mornin'? I've ben lookin' out fer you an hour to bring them cows to pasture."

"Breakfus' was late. Janey's sick."

"What's the matter with Janey?"

"I don't know. She just lies in mamma's arms and says she's so tired."

"Perhaps it's ager."

"Grandma says it isn't."

"What does teacher say?"

"Oh," and she looked up into the sky, "he said—he said he thought nothing was really the matter. He said he guessed she was delicate."

"Well, he knows," replied Peter, conclusively. "See that!" and he pointed admiringly to the buckboard. "I made it myself—wheels and all. You couldn't make a wagon like that, if you tried a year."

"Perhaps I could!"

"No, you couldn't. I've come to give you a ride to the foot of the hill."

"But the oxen might kick me!"

"Oh, no, they won't. Come, get on."

"Has Neeltje tried it?" she asked, fascinated with the idea, yet feeling timid.

"Oh, Neeltje!" and he shrugged his shoulders in supreme contempt. "Neeltje's no fun fer a boy to play with."

"If I get on, will you stop just as soon as I want you to?"

"I will. You're a lucky girl, you are, to hev the first trial. Clinch the sides—so—" and he showed her where to grip. "You want to go es fast es you can, of course"—this in an encouraging, braggadocio tone.

"Course I do!"

"Gee up, Tansy!—Haw there, Catnip!" He curled his thong in the air, bringing it sharply down.

The oxen kicked out, vaulting their clumsy bodies forward. Their leathery tails whipped across Susanna's face like cords. The small wheels of her conveyance creaked in their crazy revolutions, while the pebbles flew and the shales cracked as if an earthquake were about to open and swallow everything up.

"Gee haw! Gee up! Go it, lazies!" as the oxen, excited and frightened with the unusual hubbub at their heels, started in a mad run.

"Pete! Pete! Stop!"

"You're all right, Susanna. Jest hold on. Gee—d'ap!"

Her hair, curling in the dry wind, blew out like Medusa's locks. Her lips were parted, and her startled eyes fixed in a horrified stare. One wheel rolled off and down the hill, keeping gallantly upright till it reached the bottom. The child's knuckles were scraped till they bled, while, as a final act in this tumultuous progress, the oxen slipped the pole, and, unseated by the sudden stop, she executed an involuntary somersault in the locusts.

In relating the episode to Neeltje that night, Peter said, "I could a broken her neck es well es not ef the whiffletree'd lunged back'd a little further."

As for Susanna, she lay awake in the old loom, looking at the streaks of moonlight on the bosky tops of the apple trees, and the oxen were transformed into Arabian steeds, the mountain road into the desert, and Peter a sheik driving like mad to escape a band of robbers.

The next morning Janey was sitting on the door-sill, resting her cheek on her palm, her dolly lying across her faithful lap.

"Come, Janey," said Susanna, coaxingly, "come across the road to Whitehall. You haven't played with sister in so long."

Looking up with acquiescent gravity and reaching out her little hand as if the slightest movement were an effort, she let Susanna assist her to rise.

The leaves were nearly off the trees and the sunshine bathed everything with mellow heat. The mountains shone through the yellow haze with a soft glory as if containing no steep crags, no dangerous morasses or unpeopled solitudes. A wide peace was in the sky, the air, and upon the earth.

The children disappeared in the lean-to, but presently Susanna came running out with a cry, stopping under a tulip tree in the middle of the grass-plot, and bending over as if to disentangle her feet from something. Mrs. Dutton hurried to reach her and the nonogenarian hobbled after, his palsied head shaking at every step. Suddenly the child raised herself triumphantly, her small, nervous fingers clutching the neck of a glistening, wriggling black snake, and holding it at arm's length.

"Hold fast! Keep holding it away from you!" cried her grandmother, in an agony of apprehension and picking up a stone on her way. "Now throw it and run," she cried, reaching the child, who hurled the writhing snake with great vigor and Mrs. Dutton the stone with such effect that the reptile's back was broken.

"It didn't hurt me," said Susanna, coolly, but her eyes were blazing and her cheeks were white. "I thought my leg was asleep and I reached down to rub it — and — when I pulled up my dress —" she began to cry.

"There, there, don't cry! Run into the house while I get Janey." Stooping down, she entered the lean-to.

There sat Janey on a big stone, the seat of honor in the lean-to, her dolly on the bit of rag carpet at her feet, her flaxen head against the fence along which the play-house was built, her arms hanging at her side. She had fainted.

"Dear, dear," moaned Mrs. Dutton, picking her up and sitting down on the stone and chafing her hands. "Give me that water, father," and Mr. Brereton, who had crept in, too, handed her a small tin pail full of water. Pretty soon, the child reviving, Mrs. Dutton carried her out under the tulip tree.

Meanwhile, Susanna, full of curiosity as to where the snake had come from, roused Mr. Catherwood from his studies and escorted him to Whitehall. "Janey sat on the big stone making believe it was a rocking-chair and getting her dolly to sleep, and I sat just here on

this bench beside her, reading, making believe I was you."

The playhouse was pathetically bare of children's belongings. In one corner, on a shelf Harry had nailed up, were a few broken bits of china. The brown, packed earth was covered with pieces of worn rag carpet. There were some flowers in a cracked tumbler. A pile of cones covered with an old cradle quilt counterfeited a bed in another corner.

The young man scattered the cones. No signs of snakes there. A thoughtful gleam fell from his eye on Janey's recent seat. The flat bottom of the stone rested solidly on the ground. Lifting it by main force, he threw it aside, and as he did so, from the surface exposed a huge snake uncoiled itself and glided through the door, a barely perceptible flutter of the grass showing the track of its disappearance.

"The mate!" exclaimed Susanna, sententiously.

"Yes. Go back to the house. You have had enough of snakes for one day. I'll find it and kill it."

"I'm not afraid."

"No, but you are tired. You have been a brave little girl—a splendid little girl!" he continued, stroking her hair fondly.

She gave him a mute, rapt glance of appreciation. "O how sweet to be praised like this by one who knew so much, and was so big and grand."

Sometimes, when there had been continuous bad weather, Mr. Catherwood and his pupil returned from school by the long way; that is, they descended the hill in front of the schoolhouse and followed the turnpike. But this they had had no occasion to do for a fortnight, as the days had been one long period of brilliant sunshine and dry gales. The path through the woods had been covered with a gay carpet of russet and yellow leaves, and the mossy spots, usually so wet, were velvety and dry. Early in November, however, winter sent a forerunner in the shape of a sleety, biting rain. With a rueful glance towards the leafless forest, beckoning to her with gaunt, bare arms and calling in wailing tones, Susanna turned her face towards the farm lands, and grasping the teacher's hand, pattered beside him down the hill. Although the rain had ceased, the air was keen

and the ground a glare of ice crackling and crumbling under their feet at every step. The clouds were scurrying from the northwest and banking in the east in sullen purplish masses; streaks of pale blue shone between with the unmeaning stare of a cold, unfeeling eye. The stone houses, with their small, deep-set windows and severe blank doors unprotected by porch or piazza, stood in isolated loneliness in the midst of the wide farms. The cattle had sought shelter. No moving thing modified the neutral desolation of the scene. The child became imbued with the serious monotony of her surroundings. Occasionally, she looked up to the face beside her, but those deep-set eyes continued fixed on the frozen ground, and the proud sweetness of that firm mouth offered no suggestion of a smile. The student was far away in thought. He was back at Harvard, delving at the work of his senior year, or forecasting the privation and application a course in Divinity would mean; or, again, he was counting, for the hundredth time, the savings of his pedagogic labors and apportioning them to his various expenses. Since living with Mrs. Dutton his face had rounded slightly, but the hollows in his cheeks remained, and a clear pallor, partly natural but much intensified by continuous late study, increased the thoughtfulness of his expression. In unison with his thought, and as if a warm undercurrent of feeling vitalized each subject, he would squeeze and relax his grasp on the little hand resting confidently in his, and Susanna would return each pressure, a loving, brooding smile upon her responsive features indicative of her personal appropriation of this unconscious act.

After a while the road led through a border of Normandy poplars, whose haughty, stiff proportions looked alien to their surroundings. Their small leaves, buffeted by the wind, bristled on the twigs as if pointing fingers of scorn at their Dutch surroundings. Had some Belgian, whose heart was divided between France and the Lowlands, found a home here? Mr. Catherwood glanced at the house, back of the trees, built of stone and covered with a white stucco. Its roof had a hip, and there was an architrave under the slightly projecting eaves ornamented with a scalloped design in carved relief, a bunch of tassels hanging between the scallops.

"Who lives here, Susanna?"

"The domine."

"Domine who?"

"Domine Baltus. He comes to see grandpa, sometimes, — but not often."

"What does he live in such an out-of-the-way place for?"

She looked at him inquiringly, and he realized that his definition of her world conveyed no meaning to her.

"Where does he preach?" and he smiled from a reminiscent mind endeavoring to adjust itself to narrow limitations.

"Oh, I don't know," and she looked puzzled as if trying to think. "Yes, I do, too. He preaches at Klacs."

"And where is Klacs?"

"Over there!" Her tone had a practical definiteness as if her answer were concrete and satisfactory.

"I must make his acquaintance," said Mr. Catherwood, looking at the house a second time.

At this juncture the door opened and a corpulent man with a square, furrowed face, propped by an enormous white stock, appeared. He wore a pair of goggles pushed back over his forehead. Behind him peered a tall, high-featured woman, whose light hair was drawn severely from her forehead. Long gold ear-rings, nearly touching her shoulders, dangled in her ears. It was Domine Baltus himself and Madame, his wife, who were so intent on looking at the mountains that they did not at first notice they were observed. When they did, Madame withdrew into the house, but the domine, hobbling on a cane, shouted, "Wait a bit, wait a bit," limping to the gate as quickly as he could on gouty feet.

"The storm isn't over yet," and the old man pointed to the mountains, grim and black under the windy sky. Patches of mist, gathering volume as they travelled, floated into the hollows and chasms, nakedly visible in the cold atmosphere. A thick white scarf was waving near the summits, now covering them and again rising, leaving the sky line sharply defined. The wind, which had been fitful all day, began to cut with steady force. The bleak fields, spent from the output of the fruitful summer, and the belt of forest creeping to the roadside a short distance ahead, added to the threatening aspect of

the weather, while the declining day awoke a realizing sense of the comforts of home and shelter.

"I saw it was you, Susanna, and I want to ask a very serious question."

She looked frightened.

"Has Janey ever been baptized?"

"Oh, I think so, I think so," replied Mr. Catherwood, encouragingly and in arms, why, he did not exactly know, for his little companion.

"I hope what you tell me is true, sir, — but I have my doubts, — begging your pardon. May I ask whom I am addressing?"

"I am Louis Catherwood, sir, teacher of School No. 9."

"Ah, yes, yes. College student?"

"Harvard."

"Divinity student?"

"I expect to be."

The domine screwed up his eyes. A deeper furrow grew between his brows. His corrugated face settled into inquisitorial severity. "I shall not ask you the sect — not mine, of course. I am Evangelical Dutch Reformed."

"And I, Congregationalist."

"Tut, tut! You don't know what you will be, yet. You are just as likely to be Presbyterian. Old School, too, I hope. I don't mind changing pulpits once in a while with an Old School Presbyterian, for their body of doctrine and ours are simply incontestable, logically. And what's a sermon worth if it isn't logical? But, whatever you are," and he held up his finger warningly, "preach the doctrines in season and out. Preach depravity; preach hell-fire and judgment. Nothing else will save a lost world."

"I shall preach, 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'"

"That's well enough, young man, as far as it goes, — but it is not enough, it is not enough! You must preach baptism and regeneration and election. You must wind up every single time with the loss of the whole race in Adam, the danger of eternal damnation, and the mysteries and privileges of predestination. I've heard of you," he added, with a tone of amity, "and I've been meaning

to call at the widow Dutton's some time and have an argument with you. I heard of the way you trained Peter Vroom, and I made up my mind there was the right stuff in you. Present my respects to Mr. Brereton. He holds some hazy religious views, but he is a man and a gentleman, and his kind is growing scarce. You might say to him for me that I am ready to come down at any time to baptize Janey. This child," laying his hand on Susanna's head, "is growing up a heathen. No church, no catechism, no fear of death and hell. I hope you will embrace your opportunity and teach her to flee from the wrath to come. But I've kept you and kept myself. These things come home to me with solemn, awful force, on a night like this, when I have to ride six miles to labor with an unregenerate, godless man who wants baptism and prayers. It's all very fine to sneer at ministers till Death comes stalking along, but a sinner's tune changes then. Stofe Teeples can't live twenty-four hours — but" — there was a grim majesty about the reverend gentleman as he drew himself up in the presence of such a threatening landscape and under such a sullen sky and biting wind — "I'll haul him out of the clutches of Satan, if so be he is not elected to be damned, or my name is not Dominicus Baltus. Good night, good night! Drop in some day on your way from school," and he hobbled away, while Catherwood and Susanna hurried on.

As they came under the trees, he stooped and she sprang on his back. Holding her slender legs fast while she clasped her arms around his neck, he glanced back as he walked on, his eyes shining into hers, and said, "Don't let anybody ever scare you away from the Heavenly Father. First, last, and always, God is love."

"What did the domine mean when he asked about Janey? He said he was going to baptize Stofe Teeples, and he said Stofe was going to die. Janey isn't going to die."

"Baptism does not mean that a person is going either to die or live, child. It is a memorial act; that is, the Lord Jesus asked His disciples to baptize all those who truly love Him and desire to be His children, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. And then," he added, as if thinking aloud, "with adults, it is, or ought to be, an outward sign of an inward change."

"I love Him, Mr. Catherwood, and Janey loves Him, too. I wish we could be baptized."

"Well, perhaps you can. I will speak to Mrs. Dutton."

"I don't want Janey to die, Mr. Catherwood," she insisted anxiously.

"Janey isn't going to die. The domine has scared you. Don't mind him. You have heard a great big dog bow-wow as if he would bite your head off, haven't you? He wouldn't, all the same. He would, just as like as not, wag his tail and lick your face, if you spoke kindly to him. That's the way with the domine, I guess."

"Sometimes big dogs do bite," she said timidly.

"Girls that can pull black snakes off their legs wouldn't be afraid of dogs or domines, would they?"

Nevertheless, the next day being Saturday, the bee that the energetic Dominicus Baltus had put in her bonnet began to buzz so lustily that the household was finally made desperate by searching questions on damnation, the sin of Adam, the fate of Stofe Teeples, and why, since Janey loved Jesus, she had never been baptized.

The result was entirely to the thinking of the domine when Mr. Catherwood, towards night, trudged to the manse to invite him and Madame Baltus to take Sunday tea at the Dutton's, and as Janey was a little ailing and Mrs. Kildare had long been unable to attend church, and as the nearest sanctuary was four miles distant, to perform the rite of baptism for the children.

"As clear a case of Providence as I have ever seen, young man. We'll come, of course. It will make the day hurried, but that's no matter. I have two services at Klacs."

"Is Klacs the hamlet beyond?"

"Yes. A small field, you may say; but I have drained it and watered it; I have ploughed it and harrowed it; I have tilled it well. I have rotated the crops and brought down from heaven from time to time a rich shower of blessings. I have preached the doctrines and the doctrines and the doctrines, spring and summer, autumn and winter, year in and year out!" He clasped his hands before him and while see-sawing upon a high chair which came down with a heavy thud, sang in an orotund, ringing bass, lusty enough to lift the rafters:—

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“Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease ;
While others fought to win the prize
And sail’d through bloody seas ?”

Catherwood, meanwhile, remained standing, impatient to leave. The singing concluded, the domine took his hand in a hearty grip, and as they walked to the door commissioned him with many complex and complimentary messages for the Duttons.

“One thing more,” said the young teacher, lingering on the stoop. “Mrs. Kildare begged me to ask you kindly to remember that her little Janey is an extremely sensitive, precocious creature, and she entreats that on this account you will not mention any subject calculated to produce fear.”

“What kind of shepherd does the lady take me for? Does she suppose when a couple of lambs are walking gently and peacefully into the fold, I am going to thwack them as I would an old goat like Stofe Teeples when I see him lifting up his curious eyes and blinking over the fence, so to speak, as if the doctrines were poor fodder? No, no! The Lord carried the lambs in his bosom, and so can I. She has no need to warn me about little Janey. Others know as well as she does she is not going to keep that child.”

Much the same pleasant, suggestive stir preceding the teacher’s arrival was the preliminary of the feast made for the domine, except that there was a shade more of punctiliousness both in the greeting and entertainment of the Rev. and Mrs. Dominicus Baltus.

To Susanna, the occasion was marked, first, by the length of the blessing at supper. She had time before it was over to count one thousand as fast as she could whisper. Then, again, the conversation throughout the meal soared among big words and vast subjects, while the august bearing of the visitor, his enormous appetite, and the respectful attention paid to his ponderous comments made her vividly realize that his presence indicated an affair of unusual moment, whose cause and crown was the baptism.

Even the commotion attending the passage of so many grown people up-stairs impressed her. She saw, always to remember, a small table moved from its corner, and a

silver bowl half full of water placed on it. There were more candles lighted than usual. Everybody was dressed in his best. Mrs. Baltus made a picture of such distinction and splendor that its effect upon her memory and imagination was as lasting as if she had seen a Rubens portrait. Her gown, of changeable plum color and red silk; the "beau-catchers," with their Ionic curves, on either cheek; the long, three-jointed ear-rings, with as many movements as the pendants of the candelabra scintillating on the mantel; the wide sweep of her skirts when she sat down; the edge of lace about her throat and wrists, and the gold chain around her neck and falling in several shining rows over her high, full bosom, — all this was splendor, and the child revelled as her British foremothers in the presence of Queen Elizabeth.

There were family prayers, the little girls kneeling on either side of their mother, and feeling her thin arms about their bodies while the petition ascended in reverent, sonorous language, in which each member of the household visited was mentioned by name. The figure of the oak and the ivy, although the head of the family was missing, was dexterously interwoven, while a swelling period was rounded with the illustration of the olive branches. Susanna, unread in foreign flora, and with no premature taste for the pickled fruit of Italy developed, formed a florid notion of the olive which would have done credit to the homage rendered to the plane tree by Lydian or Persian.

Finally, there was the separate prayer for the baptism. The child held her breath, feeling deeply afraid, but there was a delightful, mystical stir in her tender soul; above all, she felt sure the right thing was being done and wondered whether, on this account, God was not in such a kind, benevolent frame of mind that he would hereafter answer her prayers as soon as they were uttered.

And then Janey and she stood in front of the minister. And Mr. Catherwood and the stately lady in the rustling silk stood up beside them. And she was astonished and tearful, though sedate and curiously attentive, when their sponsors made vows for them, in which her arch-enemy, Satan, figured conspicuously. She looked at her little sister apprehensively when the Rev. Mr. Baltus, laying his big hand dripping with water on the symmetrical

head crowned with its mat of sunny curls, said in a voice trembling with tenderness, "Jane Dulcis, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." How strange that name sounded for such a mite as Janey! And then she felt the water trickling down her own cheeks and her name too, sounding strangely unfamiliar, as the same voice, modulated to the same unexpected tenderness, solemnly enunciated, "Susanna Vere Brereton, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

Suddenly, the ceremony was completed, the group reassembled around the fire, the talk turned on the friends of the Saviour while he was on earth, and Janey fell asleep in Mr. Catherwood's arms. Susanna felt a pang of dismay when, an hour later, Celinda was summoned to tell Harry to "hitch up" for the minister.

The following afternoon, when she came home from school, Janey and she played baptism till dark in their mother's room, and all the dolls, as well as Sancho and the cat, had their heads made very wet and their names lengthened while she rolled forth the prayers and Janey uttered solemn promises to outwit Satan whenever Sancho should want to suck eggs or the cat prey on the newly hatched chickens.

And who can say, since their whole souls entered into the drama, and they had always cherished a serious responsibility concerning their pets, that their paraphrase of the pious acts of their elders was not just as acceptable in the sight of a loving God?

CHAPTER IX

SEVERAL weeks had elapsed since Mrs. Dutton had either seen or heard from Mr. MacDuffy. She had supposed that as soon as her cellar kitchen and the garden above it were completed, he would cut the slate agreed upon as payment. But the summer had glided away, September and October had passed, and the frosty, cold, uncertain weather of November had set in without an effort on his part to collect his dues. The line of buckboards, laden with the vast slabs from neighboring quarries, had ceased to pass morning and afternoon on their way to the Hudson. The deep, fine dust of the heavily cut road had been laid by the autumn rains. The solitude and monotony of the winter projected themselves upon the farm-houses, each family becoming more and more a world within itself.

Mr. Catherwood had already prolonged his stay a week beyond the allotted time, and now, although regret and dismay seized him over the near prospect of a fortnight's sojourn with the Storms, it was impossible to delay his departure beyond the following Monday — and Friday had dawned. On that last precious day of her intimate walks, an unkind headache kept Susanna at home. Janey and she accordingly put Whitehall in order for the winter. Exhausted with the unusual activity, Janey soon became tired and left Susanna to her own devices. The little one threw herself against her mother's knees and, looking up appealingly from her beautiful, gentle eyes, said wistfully, "You hasn't holded me all this long day, mamma."

Almost as weak as her frail child, Mrs. Kildare lifted the dear burden, folding it to her breast, and presently Janey fell asleep. There was a settee against the wall beside the fire. When dinner was put upon the table,

her mother placed her there, and the child slept through the bustle attendant on the meal.

After dinner, Susanna hung around wistfully, lonesome for her usual pursuits.

"Janey," she whispered, bending over her sister, "wake up!" The quiet breathing did not change. There was a thread-like streak of blue under Janey's lids that made her uneasy, and tearing from its hook her victoria, which was garment for Sancho and cloak for herself in one, and tying on the quilted crimson hood which had recently taken the place of the dimity sun-bonnet, she sauntered out of doors, and through a succession of fields uncultivated and unfrequented since Mr. Kildare's death. In the morning, this portion of the farm lay bathed in sunshine, but it was lonely in the afternoon, and in certain atmospheres assumed an uncanny aspect, feeding the child's fancy and fear at once. A high ledge separated these lower fields, as they were called, from corresponding upper ones, where the quarries were situated.

The frosts had killed the growth of weeds and tall grass. The blackberry leaves hung scraggly and red. Tufts of wild carrots and goldenrod, ragged and brown, waved in melancholy unison. There was no sunshine to weave flickering spots of brightness under the trees growing in all sorts of fantastic shapes out of the shaly soil of the ledge. The trees themselves had nearly cast their leaves, and oaks and butternuts, locusts and birches, pines and hemlocks, muttered and moaned, as if witness to some conspiracy or disaster.

She walked the entire length of the farm, her keen observation forcing her to realize the unkempt aspect of her paternal domain. The stone and worm fences were in a sorry, tumbled-down condition, everything belonging to the Kildare estate bearing evidence of that neglect which nature punishes by swift decay or too luxuriant growth. All that met her gaze was in vivid contrast with the well-being to which land under high cultivation mutely testifies. There were acres of corn just across the fence on the Storm farm, and the orderly stacks rustled fitfully in the wind. Heaps of golden pumpkins, waiting to be gathered, lay scattered among the furrows. Even while she looked, she saw the men ride in through

the bars let down on the hither side and begin to fill their carts. There were other fields recently ploughed, beginning a Davachan bliss of fallowness. The meadows looked trimly bare, although, unlike her own fields, with their crumbling walls, they showed no thinning corpses of clematis and hazel bushes, wild grape vines and mullein, sweet fern and sumac. As far as she could see, the fat lands of the Dutch seemed to stare with the lusty pride of garnered harvests upon her own frost-bitten weeds, her rattling heads of timothy and thistle, her rampant vines, whose sap-dried stalks tripped her at every step and whose horny briers penetrated her stockings, stinging her temper even more than her legs. It was like Ontario looking across the border into Michigan; there was the same soil, the same climate, and yet only a fence made them, to all intents and purposes, alien.

She pulled up a stalk of timothy, sucking it wistfully, as she turned into the woods, climbing the ledge. Here, at least, there was nothing but the hill to interfere with her progress. She kicked her way lingeringly through the fallen leaves, stopping, occasionally, to crack a butternut and extract its succulent meats. She looked up into the pine trees, chanting a soft undertone of melody to the high trills of the crickets, — into the Druidic darkness of the hemlocks forever whispering oracles. The drying oak leaves rattled like castanets, and their ruder noise was more in unison with that barbaric appreciation of sound pure and simple common to most children.

The sky above the ledge began to appear. She thought of that blue streak under Janey's white lids and hurried, taking hold of a sapling to pull herself up the last bit of steep ascent. As she came out upon the plain above, and still a little distance from the gray quarry, the click, click, click, of what seemed numerous hammers met her ear. The quarry, in times past, had been so evenly opened that only a few rods away the land gave no clue to the deep, wide cavity which sometimes in spring became a miniature lake.

She ran forward and, reaching the edge at a point where a gigantic hickory grew, peered over and beheld MacDuffy and Saunders, Hans Terberger and a dozen others, hammering and splitting, cutting and piling the

slate, and all working for dear life. The familiar nooks and crannies of the cavity where in midsummer she had roamed and idled had quite disappeared, and a rich vein, which Mrs. Dutton had often pointed out with pride, had a great hole in it; it was in this vein where most of the men were working.

She lingered, stepping farther behind the tree. Amazement and interest and a growing indignation depicted themselves on her mobile features. Was not this the gray quarry, and had not her grandmother given permission for the red quarry? An inkling of the real situation dawned upon her.

She began to run. Instead of reaching the highway in five minutes, as she might have done, her instinct led her back to the woods, lest MacDuffy should discover her. She bounded down the ledge like a squirrel. Her cheeks were as crimson as her hood when she rushed panting into the big, square living-room, sombrely dark in the waning day.

Mrs. Dutton stood beside a kettle swinging on the crane over a low fire, the sweet, heavy odor of dough-nuts boiling in lard filling the atmosphere. Her gray hair had partially dropped into her neck, and two or three locks curled up wildly over her forehead. There was a dab of flour on the end of her nose, and another on her cheek, giving her face an hilarity which she was far from feeling, and incongruous with her slow movements and composed speech. Janey still lay asleep on the settee, and beside her sat Mrs. Kildare, sewing on a new frock for Susanna. Mr. Catherwood's door was ajar, and just within, bending over his books, the excited girl noticed him as she burst in with her story.

"Mr. MacDuffy is cutting the slate, grandma. He's taking it out of the gray quarry, and it isn't him and Saunders alone. There is ever so many others. Hans Terberger and Judick Hopper's two grown-up boys are working there—and Samson Van Blankensteyn, too. They are on the vein you said would be money for you one of these days. There are fourteen men and boys in the quarry, and Mr. MacDuffy is talking away at them, hurrying them up, and making promises of whiskey and frolics and things."

"Did you say fourteen men and boys, child? It can't be true!"

"It is true. I counted them."

"Dear me, dear me! Who would have thought it!" and swinging the crane to one side, she began nervously ladling out the fried cakes into a wooden bowl.

"What are you going to do, mother?" asked Mrs. Kildare, anxiously.

"Do! Maggie. There is only one thing to do. Go up there as fast as I can and stop this robbery."

"Your hair is falling down, grandma!" said Susanna.

"I can't help it, if it is. Get my shawl."

"Wipe the flour off your face, mother. You look fairly wild."

She raised her check apron with trembling hands, whisking it over her face. Throwing the shawl around her shoulders, she hurried out.

A roaring, sounding wind shook the bare arms of the locusts. The creek, swollen by the rains, thundered through the gorge at the foot of the garden. The road, deserted and gray under the lowering sky, beckoned like a long, discovering finger. The wind whipped her calico skirt around her ankles as she tried to press forward. Susanna ran ahead, a bit of wiry, agile life, and as eager and anxious as her grandmother.

Meanwhile, Farmer Storm's men, who were in the secret of MacDuffy's raid, had spied the red hood in the lower fields. They had seen Susanna disappear in the woods and later come hurrying out and along the cart-track, home. There was a kind of unwritten law in the community to outwit families like the Kildares on every possible occasion, and MacDuffy's haul of slate, foreigner though he was, met with general approval. Moreover, he had become "forehanded" and married the half-witted daughter of Jonas Schomp, and was one of them in consequence.

"Run up the hill, Tim, and give MacDuffy the wink," said one of the men, when the child was out of sight.

Tim threw the big, yellow pumpkin he was lifting into the cart, and hurried across lots, reaching the quarry just as MacDuffy, a whiskey bottle in hand, and sipping and talking by turns, was descanting on business methods. "It's joost this way, b'ys. The gude God gave us

our eyes and ears and reason to help ourselves with, and ef we fail to seize occasions, it's none of His fault. Ef a mon's neebor meks a loose bargain, let him blame himself or herself, as the case may be, and not set in jedgment on another who teks him at his word. Thet's law, too. An' — it's Bible, too! The Bible says, continially, as it's written — an' I say as it's spoken, so shall it be."

"What aire l'yyers fer, den? I t'ought dey wus fer interpretin'. Dey may be fur interpretin' de widder contrairy-wise from what you doos," said Judick Hopper.

"The only thing the law could turn on would be her statement of the red quarry. You see fer yourselves thet vein there — Isn't it red es red kin be? Well, then, we're a-workin' in the red quarry!"

"Good fer you, MacDuffy! You're a reg'lar weasel, you aire," assented Judick, derisively. "Woll, it's your harvest penny we're a-turnin', not ourn, and a man must help a neighbor, especially when he's relashuns — but no blood relashuns — I'll swear to thet!" and Judick swaggered off.

"Hoot, mon, you'd feel too big fer your boots, I'll warrant, ef you could say you were in truth blood relashuns with me. You would be the slyest weasel goin' ef you hed the brains fer it. It teks brains to do even a weasel's contrivin'. I intend to let the widder off gentle, I'm sure. We might cut another week, joost es well es not fer all her knowin' — but to-day's the last."

"An den, too, de river might freeze up, ef we don't begin de haulin'," retorted Judick.

"The river's nothin' to do with it! It's ginerosity on my pairt."

At this juncture, Tim appeared, and, half leaping, half running down the side of the quarry, stood in the midst of the stone-cutters.

"You're in fer it, fellers. The little gal spied you an hour ago, sure. The old wumman'll be on you in a jiffy."

"'Sthat so?" inquired MacDuffy, the whiskey crimsoning his face as he spoke. "There's only wan thing to do, then, b'ys. Kite to the woods, instant, an' meet here as agreed at two o'clock to-morrer mornin' with y'r teams; an' all the recruits you bring with you to help in the haulin' will be so much money in your pockets."

While he was speaking, the men were hurriedly gathering jackets, dinner-pails, and tools; in ten minutes not a trace of them was to be seen, except the huge piles of stone, comely in quality and shape, and ready for shipping.

When Mrs. Dutton reached the quarry, a menacing silence reigned, the flags alone telling the story of the activity pervading the scene for a fortnight. She recalled, with bitter self-reproach, her own trustfulness and the Scotchman's astuteness, but she too came of thrifty stock, and she did not intend to succumb without resistance. "Well, Susanna," she said, after a solemn pause, her gaze wandering hither and thither, "there's no gospel truer than this—'To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.' MacDuffy shall not be the one to defraud us in this instance, though. I'll count the flags and make an estimate. When we go home, we will see what Mr. Catherwood says."

"Oh, yes, grandma! He'll know what to do. You won't let Mr. MacDuffy have any stones now, will you, grandma?"

"What a question! He shall have his due, but no more." She brushed away the wisps of hair straggling on her forehead, a distracted, hopeless kind of expression settling over her features. "It is dreadful to be without money, Susanna," she exclaimed, despairingly.

The child took her hand and squeezed it. This was the first time she had ever been spoken to as a grown person. The occasion seemed momentous. She became a care-taker in reality.

"Couldn't Mr. Catherwood let you have some money, grandma?"

"He's as poor as we are."

"Well, then, grandma," she said, with sudden conviction and encouragement, "I think it is nice to be poor."

"I don't know but it is, dear, after all! At all events, there are worse things in the world. Forgive your grandmother for speaking of her troubles. I guess I am getting old."

Had not her grandmother been old, then, heretofore? She looked up in supreme astonishment.

Meanwhile, the teacher had gone to the domine's. It was dark when he reached the poplars. The high box

on either side of the path leading to the front door emitted a spicy perfume. The half-curtained window revealed the Rev. Dominicus Baltus reading, and snuffing as he read.

Raising the heavy knocker, the young man rapped vigorously. The domine let him in. Standing under the ledge of the high mantel reaching to within three feet of the ceiling, he told the story of the raid.

The minister sat upright in his leather chair, his double chin resting solidly on his stock, his portly knees clasped by either hand.

"The robbery must be stopped! It must be stopped! I never liked that MacDuffy. He's as tough an old Scotch Presbyterian as they make 'em. He perverts the doctrines on every occasion, twisting Scripture for every lying meanness. He's a drunken old sinner, with a trick at religion. He'll damn his soul as sure as you are alive, unless we step in to turn him aside from the wrath of the Almighty. — Lord God of Israel," he exclaimed, lifting his eyes to the ceiling, "through thy omniscience, omnipresence, and foreordination, endue thy servants with wisdom to contravene the wily craft of the devil's logician, arming us with the thunderbolts of thy justice, the wisdom of that crafty serpent which beguiled first Eve, and through Eve, Adam, to the loss of their proud inheritance and the consequent depravity of all mankind. Do thou send us forth covered with the panoply of righteousness, enabling us valorously to defend the widow and the fatherless, — to the glory of thy holy Name. Amen! — Now, sir, we are ready for business," he continued, springing to his feet and pounding the schoolmaster on the back. "That Scotchman will try to haul the slate this very night. Widow Dutton can't afford to go to law with him, and if he once gets possession, she can whistle for all he'll care. The weasel let things rest till everybody else stopped shipping, and took the risk of the river freezing because he thought none of that decrepit family would travel over the farm after the crops were in. Susanna is in it every single time, though. I've always had a fondness for the child, and since Madame Baltus stood her sponsor I like her better than ever. Never tell me, young man, that the Lord didn't appoint the baptizing."

"What did I ever say against it?" demanded Catherwood, with a smile.

"Oh, I know you easy-going Congregationalists. It was first abhor with you. Then you raised up men like Jonathan Edwards and Cotton Mather. Then it was endure with you, and Channing appeared to refine away the awful God majesty of Christ, and sinners ceased to quake. Then came Emerson, with just about as much religion as the Jews had before the Gospel, and he says, in substance, Let every man gang his own gait. It is a wonder the whole crew of you did not sink long ago on the crazy raft of universal salvation. But you'll have to come back one of these days to Satan and Hell, — and Depravity spelt with a capital, — but it won't be in my time — it won't be in my time. I tell you the 'Institutes' of Calvin have got to prevail in this sin-cursed world."

"Well, apply them to MacDuffy, and tell me what you propose."

"You and I must stay in that quarry to-night till they come, when I'll give him a piece of my mind. The others are Dutch Reformed, every one of them, thank the Lord! and I stand to them as the delegated power of God. I can soon settle them. I'd ask you to supper, but you had better go home and try to comfort that burdened woman. Reach the quarry at about ten."

The domine conducted him to the door with a candle, and as the older man stood there framed in the Rembrandt darkness, he regarded the younger one with a grim fondness lighting up his leonine features. "I wish I had a son like you. The Lord has denied me children, and so I go about the world picking a lad out here and a girl there that I'd like to call my own. I don't know but I take more comfort in my boys and girls than most people do. There are compensations — there are compensations all the way along, young man. I'm not unmindful of the mercies and the love, but they are like precious stones — to be possessed sparingly or they become of no account."

The schoolmaster gave his hand an answering grip and stepped out into the darkness.

A few hours later, when the moon began to send a pale aurora-borealis glimmer along the horizon, both men set out for the quarry, although in opposite direc-

tions. Each carried an unlighted lantern and a fagot of pine-knots. On reaching their rendezvous, they clambered cautiously down into the quarry and, lighting the lanterns, surveyed the deep bottom in every direction.

"The thief, the robber, the hypocrite!" exclaimed the domine, in a stifled breath. "Here is a dozen times the value agreed upon by the widow. There seems to be no place in the unworked portion for us to conceal ourselves. We shall have to construct one. Yonder is an angle, and by piling up a few of the ragged, useless flags, we can make a sheltered den."

An hour later, the jutting stones simulated a natural continuation of a ledge, and opposite the point where the quarrying had been most actively pursued. The summit of the projection was so arranged that it could be reached by easy steps, while a short distance behind and higher, forming the rear of the den and making a broad shelf, was a second piece of unhewn slate. Here the fagots were laid ready for lighting, and they would be sufficient, when in full blaze, to illuminate the scene. Depositing a mysterious bundle which he had brought in addition to his lantern and the pine-knots, the minister sat down on a stone facing the wind, making a place beside him for the schoolmaster.

"Take the corner yourself, sir. You will feel the draft less."

"Tut, tut, I'm better seasoned than you are and tougher, too, even at sixty. You are as thin as a shad and as bloodless. Books have their value, but experience, man, experience will count more in the end. The proper study of mankind is man."

The two men relapsed into silence, unbroken save by the varied and mysterious sounds of the wind as it whispered through the crevices of the ledges or the funnel of the quarry, or soughed over the level land towards the forest.

By midnight, the domine began to get impatient; for the cold had grown intense, the moon was resting on the tops of the trees flanking the ledges, and thick, fleecy clouds with a thin, gray lining were gathering from all directions, like the marshalling of the clans.

"The winter is going to set in with an early and deep fall of snow," he said, looking around his cup-like hori-

zon. "I hoped it would be a little later, but I might have known better. We have had the rains; the streams are full. The crops have been heavier than in ten years, and I never remember such a harvest of nuts. The squirrels and rabbits will have need of all their store before spring. Ugh! but it is cold! Button your coat closer around your throat. Here's an extra handkerchief to tie around it," and he handed his companion an immense and not unwelcome bandanna.

The moon had nearly set, and the gathering darkness was fast making the nearest objects invisible. The wind died to a fitful, occasional whisper. The air grew damper, intensifying the slightest sound. A faint rumbling of carts became audible. Bars were let down. The cautious tread of horses, feeling their way over the stubble, and the creaking of wheels over the frozen ground could be heard.

"They are coming," said the domine, eagerly, undoing his bundle.

"What's that?" inquired the teacher.

"My robes, man! You didn't suppose I was going to give them the thunders of Sinai, did you, unless I was apparelled in the garments of my holy office. But it is my zeal alone which is keeping the very marrow from freezing in my bones. Peer around the corner and tell me what you see."

The schoolmaster crept out, stiff with cold, and peered down the quarry. MacDuffy, carrying a lighted lantern, was leading the way and had already reached the bottom. The others followed rapidly after, their familiarity with the ground rendering them fearless. They were all there—fourteen men and boys, as Susanna had accurately counted. A row of lighted lanterns was set at intervals from the first pile of flags to the nearest buck-board, and they went vigorously to work to carry the huge slabs out.

"We will let them load three teams, which would be about MacDuffy's righteous earnings," whispered the domine, when Catherwood reported. "Now help me on with my gown," he said eagerly, when the fourth team was brought to the edge of the opening. "As I go up into my pulpit, set fire to the fagots. They will think it is God's rebuke on their damned business."

MacDuffy had just reached a pile of enormous stones cut from the seam in which Mrs. Dutton had taken so much pride, and in the very centre of the quarry. Pulling a bottle of whiskey from his pocket and taking several hasty, gulping swallows, he handed it around.

The spirits warmed the men, and they grew hilarious.

"Whist!" said MacDuffy, in a resonant whisper, hearing a stone fall in the den. The workers drew themselves erect, their faces alert, and, huddling into a guilty group, looked in the direction of the sound. Superstition and horror rooted them to the spot as, in the dim light of the lanterns, they beheld a figure, like that of a man but of unusual proportions, loom above the farthest ledge and stand there motionless but menacing.

At this minute the fagots ignited, and the fatty pine-knots sending up a mass of lurid red and smoking flames revealed the bold and rugged outlines of the domine in a Dantesque setting, and the faces of the raiders, crimson and awe-stricken, half turned away, as if their owners would like to flee, but dared not.

"In the name of the God of Israel!" exclaimed the minister in august tones, his arm outstretched, his finger pointing at MacDuffy. "In the name of the widow and the fatherless! I, Dominicus Baltus, the preacher of the truth, the shepherd of the sheep, the keeper of the fold, denounce you — wolves, jackals, thieves, sinners, damned! Renounce your allegiance to yonder Scotch devil — hypocrite, perverter of Scripture, whiskey-biber, scoundrel! — or you will go straight as an arrow to the blackest pit of the bottomless abyss. I am ashamed of my church members — Judases — every one of you. You must undo your wickedness, repenting in sackcloth and ashes, or I will unchurch you, refusing you the sacrament, not praying with you in sickness, or burying you in death — or my name is not Dominicus Baltus. I am the appointed of the Lord, to establish equity and watch over the defenceless." Changing his tone to one of command, he continued: "And thou, Beelzebub MacDuffy, thou vile scum of the earth, haul the flags already laden to the Hudson. Those are your just due. They are all you can have. You will have to run a race with the Lord's own weather, though, for the winter has set in this night."

MacDuffy began to demur, but his companions drawing away from him, he turned and walked sullenly from the quarry, his sons following. On the rim of the vast enclosure he halted, and shaking his fist at the domine cried: "I'll get even with you! You have robbed Peter to pay Paul. The widder made a fair and square bargain, and now she's got her cellar and I have only a tithe of my stones. I'll get even with you!"

"Away with you!" shouted the domine, waving his arms, his black sleeves flapping like wings.

Nothing was heard for five minutes but the slow retreat of the teams. Then the domine, assuming a tender, injured tone, began a melting expostulation with his church members. At the conclusion of the exhortation, the men fell upon the remaining flags, loading the other teams.

When the stones had been carried out, a procession started towards the widow's. The domine sat side by side with Judick Hopper on the first team, and the schoolmaster with Samson Van Blankensteyn on the last, and by daybreak the surplus flags were stored in the wood-house, ready for shipping in the spring. When their task was completed, Mrs. Dutton, who had stayed up all night to prepare the propitiatory feast, invited the men into the kitchen. The domine sat at the head of the table and Mr. Catherwood at the foot. The blessing was as long as a prayer, but it was endured and remembered as preliminary to a breakfast of corned beef and cabbage, buckwheat cakes and soda biscuit, ham and eggs, and preserves, cake, pie, and coffee that beat all the cooking of all the stone homesteads for miles around.

The robust religion of the domine and the activity of the schoolmaster had provided the aliens with a handful of friends, and furnished Susanna with a new conviction which was summed up in a profound belief that a house without a man in it is badly off indeed.

The domine's prophesy concerning the weather proved true; for, when morning broke, the sky was covered with a stony, gray curtain, parting only where the sun in his approach to the zenith looked out on the frozen, shivering earth with a frigid, leering eye. Towards noon, the clouds became lighter and denser. The trees appeared shrunken and as if listening. The edges of the

creek showed a thick border of ice. There was no wind, but there was an awful coldness.

Long before dark, the schoolmaster insisted on going to the barn, to look after the animals for the night. The chickens, huddled in sheltered spots, stood on one foot, blinking out of half-closed eyes on the discouraging landscape, and ruffling their feathers into thicker blankets.

Harry came down from the mountain side to bring in an extra supply of wood and water, hurrying home lest the storm should overtake him. Before he had finished, the snow began — a fine, icy, powdery, scattered fall at first, then growing in volume, until it danced and whirled and soared and descended in thick, white, dry swirls, spinning like feathers over the frozen earth. The wind set in from the northwest, howling through the locust thicket and the apple trees like a banshee. The snow drifted against the new cellar kitchen and piled up over the outside steps leading to the parlor. It filled in the hollow under the locust copse and banked against the west windows of the parlor. It sifted and heaped in the orchard till Mr. Catherwood's window disappeared. In front of the house the turnpike lay bare and shone in the early twilight like vitrified clay. The trunks of the venerable, stately locusts opposite were spattered with the white, glistening powder, the wind beating it into the pores and crevices of the bark with such force that it made a delicate, pallid mosaic. Above, the twisted branches waved and tossed, and bent and writhed like Laocoön and his sons in the grasp of the monster serpents.

Within the old gray house, as the evening came on, the nonogenarian nodded in his armchair in the sheltered corner beside the fire. The schoolmaster sat in his room trying to study, and Susanna was curled up on the foot of his bed reading one of the Knickerbockers. Mrs. Dutton had prepared the supper, and Janey was on her mother's lap. There was the brief lull of quiet while the tea was brewing and before the candles were lighted.

It was one of those bitter nights when a person can sit beside a hearth with a pleasant sense of warmth in front of him and a sensation of slowly freezing marrow in his back. The supper-table accordingly was set near the

great, broad-throated fireplace, and the seasoned back-log was piled with hickory till the hearth was a mass of cheerful flame. But the wind blew in under the door and the snow sifted through the windows, and the icy dampness filled the atmosphere, the fiercer gusts of the howling gale cradling the house on its foundations.

As Janey refused to eat, the settee was drawn still closer to the fire, and a couch made for her on the pillows piled in one corner. Her mother turned from the table, vainly coaxing her to drink some milk. The fire touched her curly head with gold, and her intelligent, thoughtful blue eyes were fixed with solemn wonder on the windows from which the day had now quite faded. How the frozen snow, like pellets of hail, tapped, tapped, on the glass! How white the drifts yonder in the garden faintly gleamed! How strange and mysterious and varied were the tempestuous cries of the wind, moaning through crannies, whispering down the staircase, shrieking through the trumpet of the chimney, and wailing in hollow, prolonged notes through nature's harps of many strings! The child had no words for her sensations, but every message of the storm found its interpretation in her delicate nerves.

She was not the Janey of a month ago. She was almost as white as the ethereal snow winglessly soaring with the freedom of a bird, down towards the earth or up towards the sky. She was a waiting spirit, lingering for some unknown summons. In spite of poverty, she had been a lamb well cared for. Though her very name was known to but a few, it was as sacred to those few as that other name significant of a birth into immortality. She was a small, still presence, clad in a beautiful but frail body, and while three or four persons cherished her as Janey, they recognized that in some unusual manner she embodied love.

And so, while the talk went on at the table, none were unmindful of her at any moment. Even Susanna, to whom the storm gave hunger and life, left her seat to offer her sister a morsel of warm biscuit saturated in maple syrup.

When the meal was over and the candles placed on the high shelf against the chimney and the light struck down on the flaxen head, Mrs. Kildare uttered a stifled gasp; for there was a violet shadow under the large, bright

eyes and about the tender mouth. But at this instant, the young schoolmaster approaching the child, she turned towards him and smiled.

He bent down to take the fragile creature in his arms, but stepped back suddenly, white and awe-stricken. "Why! — why! — our little Janey! — I think — she — is — dead, Mrs. Kildare."

The great storm had ceased by noon on the following day, but such a fall of snow within so short a period had never been known before in that region. The cold grew more and more intense till the water froze a few feet from the fire. The neighborhood was snowbound.

Early in the morning, Catherwood built a huge fire in the parlor and carried Janey up the narrow, dark stairs in his strong, tender arms. Her mother followed slowly, her hand against her side, pressing back a strange, new pain.

The big room, so cheerful and light in summer, looked barren on that bleak, winter morning. The fire hardly made an impression on the pungent, choking cold. The front windows revealed a wilderness enswathed in billowy, ice-encrusted snow, glittering with a cruel, unfeeling sparkle. The west window, under which they laid Janey, was curtained with a drift.

The stricken mother, exhausted and heartbroken, went to lie down. The schoolmaster, shovel in hand, went out to tunnel a path to the barn. Old Egerton Brereton, tearless, calm, and outwardly unmoved, sat beside the fire, his eyes closed, his shrivelled, purple hands resting on the arms of his chair. Mrs. Dutton, with the majestic restraint and fortitude of the house-mother, under the combined pressure of grief and duty, went about the inevitable tasks of a home where there is but one pair of hands to prepare the meals and attend to the general welfare of a family. She had aged perceptibly during these two nights of anxiety and grief and sleeplessness.

Susanna, left to herself, wandered from room to room, from the attic to the kitchen, and back again, with a kind of wide-eyed, apprehensive smile. She had never seen death before. She did not clearly realize what it was. But there was something awful, new, and mysterious in the general atmosphere, and, in a dumb way, she felt as if some one were to be propitiated. When

she saw the family separate for the first time, she crept up-stairs to where Janey was.

How strange and unnatural the parlor looked! The candelabra seemed all eyes, glassy and staring. She shunned the mirror, dreading to behold her own image there — alone! Could that be Janey — over there — in the cold corner of the room — so near the window with the icy snow piled against it?

She went stealthily forward, half sceptical, much fascinated.

Presently, she ventured to lift the sheet. Her fear left her. Her sense of the unnaturalness and unreasonableness of Janey's silence fled. Her little sister was only asleep. Her cheeks were pink once more — and how red her lips were! She knelt down beside Janey, touching her first with just a finger, then lifting the slender hand, still flexible. It was very cold, but so were her own hands. And Janey had on her best white frock. Was death a festival? She squeezed the attenuated hand in hers. Often, before, there had been a heat in it which had made the older child restless.

"Squeeze my hand, too, Janey," she said, in a low voice. But Janey, always so willing to do whatever was required of her, did not respond.

"Janey," she urged, "I'm holding your hand. Don't you feel it?" She began to look anxiously at that still, sweet face. The hand in hers began to seem still colder than her own. There was no slight lifting of the tucked waist on Janey's breast. Then, first, she realized that her little sister did not breathe.

An uncanny, withdrawn look crept over her features. The life in her was shrinking from death. She sprang to her feet with a moaning, quivering cry and, running across the room, rushed up the stairs to the attic, now covered with drifts of snow, and going to the old loom threw herself down, drawing the covers over her head — to shut away that strange, still Janey, and that awful fear, eternal as nature and as true as instinct, which takes possession sooner or later of the bravest.

CHAPTER X

THROUGHOUT that bitter Saturday the fires, which the schoolmaster persistently piled with pine and hickory, served only to temper the intense cold. The wind kept up a perpetual warfare, fashioning new drifts and scooping out others as if they were sand banks. The only sound fighting with the wind for supremacy over the absolute silence otherwise investing the bleak, white landscape was the roar of the creek.

The top of the huckleberry knoll showed reddish brown with its carpet of pine needles, while the fence just back of it had disappeared. The snow from the fan-like branches of the trees powdered down, whitening the needles one minute only to be swept away the next to the ever-increasing drift along the fence.

At sunset, the sky became an even expanse of splendid blue; but when the sun went down, along the western horizon flared a band of orange, above which a delicate green shadow filtered into the blue. Then the color began to fade from the sky, as if the firmament of whiteness below were gradually bleaching the firmament above.

Not a person had passed the gray old homestead from morning till night. And over by the west window lay Janey.

Early the next morning, although the cold continued, the wind had subsided, and the schoolmaster got ready to try to cut his way through to Klacs, four miles distant. The sole vehicle the estate possessed was a spring-wagon, and the horse, like the wagon, had grown decrepit with years. But there was much to be done. The little family huddled together in the door, anxiously watching his departure. A hundred rods away, and just beyond the bridge where the creek crossed from the upper half

of the farm to the lower, the horse came to a standstill and the wheels sank in a drift while the body of the wagon wedged into it as solidly as if it were a vast loaf of sugar.

The young man sprang out, his tall, slight form etched against the dazzling snow like a spot on the sun, and began to shovel. When he was able to lead the horse slowly through the barrier, he waved his hat, and, without further difficulty, went on out of sight.

There seemed to be nothing to do that quiet, lonesome Sabbath but sit and wait. The ancient clock in the living-room tolled off the hours solemnly but sedately as if, like Egerton Brereton, it had outlived vivid emotion. And the valetudinarian sat in his chair and dozed, seemingly a little more shrivelled, a little yellower, and with an expression of retrospection as suggestive of centuries as that of Michael Angelo's recording prophets in the Sistine Chapel. Susanna followed her grandmother everywhere, and the desolate mother alternated between sacred vigils beside Janey and attacks of exhausted stupor when, emotion subsiding, a foreshadowing thankfulness that her little one, at least, would never be motherless fell upon her spirit.

When Catherwood returned, late in the afternoon, there was something in the back of the wagon arresting Susanna's attention. It was carried up-stairs and uncovered, and the parlor was filled with the pungent, unpleasant odor of fresh varnish. A sickening sensation stole over the child.

She stood beside the schoolmaster, looking up into his face and appreciating some difference there; for there were lines about his mouth, and his deep eyes, though glancing kindly at her, wore an absent expression making her miss the sense of personal sympathy. She watched him uncover the top of the narrow box, standing on tiptoe and looking in, eagerly, when it was lifted. Her mother put a thin, trembling hand inside, feeling the bottom and the pillow, and turned aside weeping and saying, "It is too hard for my little Janey."

And then Susanna understood. She began to cry. Mrs. Dutton wiped her eyes, speaking consolingly to her, but the little girl, feeling tears dropping on her face, looked up. Her grandmother was crying too.

The next morning there was a thaw and the sun shone with a warmth that seemed springlike after the bitter cold. The drifts began to sink and the slush became almost unfathomable.

Towards noon, Harry appeared. A little later a carriage was visible on the turnpike. The Rev. Dominicus Baltus was coming to make arrangements for the funeral the following day.

There still remained a duty for the schoolmaster to perform; for, on reaching Klacs, he had found the sexton in bed sleeping off a fit of drunkenness. Orders for the funeral had to be left with the man's wife, a dull, silent woman who asked questions with an interrogative grunt and answered them with an affirmative one or a negative nod. But Catherwood took the precaution to write Mrs. Dutton's wishes out in detail, and he began his return ride with the comfortable belief that these instructions would be carried out. No sexton having appeared, however, by that Monday afternoon, and no substitute, the young man, shovel and pick over his shoulder, stole away up the road. Crossing the bridge, he turned aside into the nearest field, making his way with some difficulty to the huckleberry knoll which formed a small promontory opposite the garden but separated from it, now, by a roaring, turbulent flood.

The summit of the knoll was as exposed and dry as the surrounding land was spongy and wet. The sun was still two hours above the mountains, and long, golden beams filtered through the gracious, spreading branches of the pines gently rocking and swaying like happy, comforting mothers. The schoolmaster felt possessed by a serene, consoling presence. It seemed as if the earth were rejoicing because she was again to receive bone of her bone, flesh of her flesh. And why should she not? she—the mother of all that is visible,—of beautiful trees and waving grass and delicate flowers.

He began to turn up the shaly soil. It yielded readily, the frost not having had time to go far below the surface. As the grave deepened, the reddish shale, so light and dry, caught the unbroken sunlight, and, in the revealing glow, looked so clean, so naturally free from suggestion of decay or damp, that the knoll appeared imbued with the very spirit of Janey's daintiness and beauty.

When the little tomb was completed, the teacher rested on the handle of his spade. He could see the attic window which the loom overlooked. The window was up and on the sill leaned Susanna. She was wrapped in a big shawl, but her head was bare and at that distance he could perceive her hair blowing back from her temples. There was something pathetic in the way she was straining forward.

His was a tender, large nature, and he feared lest the severe conditions of life about her, sturdy as she was, would invest Janey's translation with needless gloom. Throwing down his tool, and waving his hand to her, he hastened to the house. She was in the door as he approached.

"Get your bonnet, Susanna."

She ran in, coming back in an instant.

"Jump on my back, for I want to carry you to the beautiful spot where Janey's little body is going to be kept."

As she sprang up, clasping her hands so tightly around his neck that she almost choked him, he noticed how hot and dry they were. In what strange, gruesome ways, forgotten by older people, might she not be suffering.

"Don't the pine trees look cheery and sheltering, Susanna? I would like to sleep summer and winter where I could hear the voices in them, wouldn't you?"

"Yes. I love them. Do you see that little one bending over to the creek and back over the knoll? It's my tree. I sit in the top of it in summer."

"Beautiful! It is right under your tree that Janey is going to rest."

"Is it?" she exclaimed brightly. "I think she will like it there—only—Janey is always—so 'fraid—nights!"

"She won't be afraid any more. And only a part of Janey will be there—the part that can't get hurt, that can't get lonesome, or feel cold or too hot. In some way, just what way I can't tell, the part of Janey that made her put her arms around you and play with you, and tell us all, over and over, how much she loved us,—that part of Janey is with God."

"Yes,—but—how did part of her get there?"

"I don't know. I only know that what I tell you is true." The deep conviction in his voice satisfied her.

And now, having entered the field leading to the knoll, he stopped talking, knowing that she must adapt for herself the first sight of the grave.

As soon as they reached the dry earth, she slid down to her feet. Taking her hand, he gently led her forward.

They came to the grave just as the sun flooded the entire space under the trees. In contrast with their sombre green and the snow, the warm color of the earth and the glimmering red carpet of pine needles made the spot look cheerful and protected.

"I prepared the grave for our dear little Janey."

"Have you been down in that deep hole?"

"Yes, and I couldn't help noticing how blue the sky was as I looked up through the trees. I think it would be nice if we took a quantity of the pine needles and covered the bottom over. If Janey should be able to see us from heaven, and perhaps she does, she would like it because we made it look pretty. She was so fond of pretty things."

Susanna ran hither and thither under the trees, scraping the needles together.

"I'll tell you a better way," said the schoolmaster, eagerly, and as if the idea would be sure to please her. "I have a shovel here, as you see, and, if you would let me put you in the grave, you could spread the needles on the bottom as I threw them in."

The proposition seemed a daring one to him, and he waited with some curiosity for her reply.

She looked in. It was deep and dark. Then she gazed into his eyes with a child's large confidence, and assented.

Leaning over the edge, he lowered her nearly to the bottom, letting her drop gently on her feet.

There was a passing, scared expression on her face as she looked up. A lump came into his throat as he saw the love and trust illuminating her features.

The next instant, he threw a shovelful of the needles in, and she became so busy, making a thick even bed, that presently she had no thought of anything but completing it to her satisfaction.

When it was done, the schoolmaster knelt and lifted her out. She turned and looked at the shining red bottom, and now that she had been there, and had come forth, it possessed no mystery or terror.

Breaking off some of the young, thick branches from the pines, he gave her an armful to carry and brought the others himself. He lined the grave, Susanna handing him each branch, and, at the very last, he placed at the head the largest and most luxuriant one of all, broken from her own tree.

The shadows were gathering when the task was completed, but the grave looked so sheltered and green, and, far down, the soft bottom so dry and warm, that the child stood gazing at it all as if she had long been familiar with such scenes. And now, too, although she had neither years nor philosophy to analyze the truth, it was not only Janey's grave but hers; for she was experiencing that comfort older people find in doing something with their own hands and out of the impulses of their own love for the beloved, who, though invisible in body, grow so mysteriously near in spirit.

Meanwhile, Harry had driven to the nearest neighbors to tell them of Janey's death and the hour for the funeral on the following day.

When Mrs. Storm heard the news, she went silently about her work, furtively wiping the tears with her apron. Nicholas was with the cattle, and her husband, puffing silently from his old, stained pipe, made no comment. It was otherwise with Saskia. There was an immediate access of animation in her tone and manner, and presently she slipped into the "best room," where she became absorbed in looking over garments, rich in material and ancient in fashion, and which never saw daylight except at weddings and funerals.

The Vrooms were a bustling, loquacious family, and whenever anything happened in the neighborhood, Mrs. Vroom began to clean her house. It was all she had to do to give vent to whatever emotion was uppermost. The house stood so far away from the road, and the farm was surrounded by such wide tracts of forest, that little dust accumulated in the barren, sparsely furnished chambers. Sighing heavily from time to time, Peter's mother wound a worsted muffler about her head, and crossed a small homespun shawl over her bosom, tying it in a knot behind. She gathered her implements together with a fiery energy growing with its application, until her countenance, a few minutes before lugubrious in the extreme,

assumed a contented alertness, and her manner a bristling importance enlivening a situation otherwise gloomy. Throwing open the wooden shutters of her company room, as the temperature permitted out-of-doors scrubbing, she prepared to wash the windows.

"A man ud t'ink it wus our funeral, mother," said her husband, sententiously, as she splashed the water up against the panes and rubbed and polished as if her life depended on it.

"It may well be! it may well be! To-day, to-morrer, nex' day, who can tell? We aire flowers of de grass, Joris, you an' me. De domine say so,—we fades—de grass widders—an' I hev ben a-worritin' ever sence de last sacrament, for de domine, he p'inted his finger at me an' he say, says he, 'Wummin, see well t'it—set dy house in order'—an' I trem'le all over when he say dat; for I t'ought of dem preserve quinces 'at needed bilin' down cause dey wus a-workin'; an' I t'ought on your shirts, Joris, how de wris'bands wus a-frayin' out. Sence Domine Baltus p'int his finger at me an' say, 'Wummin!' I hev ben a-ketchin' up wid de work a leetle. When I heerd Janey hed ben called, an' so suddin, I says to myself, 'It is as de good domine say'—an' I t'ink what if de nex' flower what goes am a Vroom flower. An' den I t'ink, too, how very bad it be ef dese winders couldn't speak up fer Grietje Vroom; an' I see Saskia Storm a-snoopin' her long nose into t'ings, an' so I lose no time. I wants to be able to hold my head up an' look Domine Baltus in de eye wid a clear conscience ef he say to-morrer 'Grietje Vroom, hast dou set dy house in order?'"

Joris looked serious, nodding emphatically when she had finished.

"A pious wife, mother, it is a good t'ing. De winders shine nice in de sunlight. Ef we do hev a funeral here to-morrer—nex' day—nex' year—Saskia Storm kin find not'in' to please pryin' eyes. You be a good wife. You works from mornin' to night. You do mine pleasure. You keep mine house clean. You saves money an' you teks fine care of mine children." Joris walked away, smoking hard, and Grietje, thus encouraged, went to the well for another bucket of water with which to give the windows a final splashing.

When Harry reached Janse Van Voorhies' house, he

lingered long enough to drink a glass of Janse's beer and have a comforting talk with Caty Ann, Janse's wife. To Harry's knock, it was Janse himself who opened the upper half of the broad green door leading into the living-room, and the farmer knew at once from the messenger's aspect that he was the bearer of mortuary news.

"Come in, man, come in. We've hed a bad spell o' weather."

Stamping his feet and taking off his shabby, time-stained hat, Harry shuffled into a kitchen which was the ornament of the community. The aged negro rubbed his hands on one side of the hearth and the farmer stood on the other side rubbing his.

"Woll," said Janse, gravely, as the colored man continued silent, his lips trembling over his toothless mouth, "I s'pose de ole man's dropped off et last. But he's hung on a long time an' 'twas to be expected. I've ben a-watchin' fer it, an' Caty Ann, she said yisterday when de wind wus a-blowin' so — thet de ole man'd go dis time, sure. Did he ketch a cold, or did he jes' run down like?"

Harry looked up, his eyes full of tears. "It was the leetle gal."

"You don't say so! I must call my wumman. — Caty Ann," cried Janse up the staircase, "come here! Dere's bad news from Mis' Dutton's."

Mrs. Van Voorhies presently came tripping down the stairs with a light, quick step, and her face was full of concern. She was a short, thick-set woman with a clean pink-and-white face, serene blue eyes, and a touch as light as a feather, as she laid her hand on Harry's arm. "Is it de grandfaather, Harry?"

"Leetle Janey!" and Harry choked.

"My, my! But I knowed it, I knowed it!" and Caty Ann shook her head mournfully. "She warn't like other childern. Me and her mother fell a-cryin' onct. I forget what it was about — but Janey, she says, says she, a-puttin' her hand on her heart jes' so — 'Don' cry, it makes me feel so bad here!' An' she put her arms aroun' her mother's neck an' wiped away her tears with her own leetle apron. An' so it's Janey! How'd it happen, Harry? An' how'd you git along at your house wid de drifts an' de wind an' de cold? It wus awful 'nough here, an' Janse an' me wid nothin' to do but keep warm. As

'twas, Janse's horse, Nancy, got a cough, an' my stock gillies wus frosted. See de poor t'ings," and she pointed to a window full of plants.

Harry glanced absent-mindedly at the flowers and nodded.

"'Dshe die in the night?" asked Caty. "'Dshe go hard?"

"It was quite onexpected. She was a-smilin' like at Mr. Catherwood. She thought a powerful lot of him, she did. An' that was all! There warn't no dyin'! An' she looks so nateral—as nateral as your posies there!"

"Janse, I must go back with Harry an' see ef I c'n be of use—thet is, ef you've given out all your notices, Harry."

"I've only been to the Vroomses an' the Storms an' you. But I ain't a-goin' much further, the roads is so bad. The horse hed to pull through to Klacs an' back yister-day fer the coffin, an' he's so old, he's 'bout tuckered out. I'll drive on to the Pickels an' the Covenhovens, but that's all. I hope the other neighbors won't have hard feelin's, thinkin' they wus left out."

"Woll, you jes' stop fer me on your way back, an' I'll be ready."

Mrs. Dutton was very busy that last day before the funeral; for, although because of the almost impassable roads, she expected few to be present, she knew that in accordance with the customs of the community she must have a table set out loaded with food and drink at which her neighbors could, on their return from the grave, feast and gossip as long as they chose. And, as Celinda was storm-stayed on the mountain and Harry was busy with outside matters, she and her daughter roused themselves from their grief and cooked and baked from morning till night.

"One would think we were getting ready for a wedding, mother," said Mrs. Kildare, mournfully, panting under the unwonted exertion.

"I can do it all, Maggie, if you will only let me. Do sit down. You worry me so, trying to keep going."

"And you worry me, mother, burdened with us all when you ought to be resting and free from care."

"O Maggie, Maggie, what should I do, if I hadn't you to love!"

And thus the two women alternately cheered and comforted each other, and the day wore away, and the cakes and pies and biscuits accumulated, while the odor of a ham boiling penetrated the whole house.

Towards night, Mrs. Storm and Mrs. Van Voorhies came, staying till the table was set out for the next day, the family, like the Israelites at the time of the Passover, expecting to breakfast from hand to mouth when and where they could.

In the mysterious manner common to sparsely settled neighborhoods, the news of the funeral spread, and at ten o'clock on that November Tuesday, vehicles of all descriptions began to dot the snowy turnpike. There were yellow sleighs with fan backs, and green ones with bellying sides and lofty, curving dashboards. Some had bells, and the matter-of-fact farmers, enjoying the first sleigh-ride of the season, came circling up before the door in flourishing fashion, the women throwing back the heavy buffalo robes and alighting with pomp mingled with curiosity and expectation. Carryalls filled with big families and their helpers creaked slowly through the half-melted drifts, and out from the black interiors, smelling of leather and poorly ventilated barns, men, women, and children poured. High buggies, shining and pert, brought lovers, sorry their courting was suspended as the old gray house came into view. It was a thrifty, wealthy community, and the well-kept conveyances, the sleek horses turning into the barnyard and into the rickety barn, afforded ample evidence of the fact.

The men lingered about the kitchen door, expectorating from time to time till the virgin snow was spotted with yellow-margined holes.

The women stopped long enough, before going up-stairs, to examine the table, feeling the linen, lifting the plates and cups, and examining the designs and labels. Saskia Storm, in a rustling purple silk and a poke bonnet with a weeping feather curling down the side, winked at Mrs. Vroom and, looking all around to see if the coast were clear, opened the cellar door and stepped inside.

Grietje nudged Joris, and presently Saskia came tripping back, her dress held high and her long, flaring nose a bed of wrinkles.

"I should think they would all die," she whispered to

Grietje. "The boxes and barrels aire floatin', and the water drippin' down the wall like all persessed. Everything is chuck agin the ceilin' on swing-boards, and it's as much as your neck's wuth to see ef they've pervided a plenty."

"Dey's done de best dey kin, an' dat's 'nough!" said Grietje.

"They aire a shiftless lot an' I think the sooner they die off, the better! Sech notions an' so — poor!"

"Domine Baltus sets a store by 'em," said Grietje, doggedly.

This was a proof of respectability Saskia could not gainsay, and she went up-stairs.

At this juncture, the Rev. and Mrs. Dominicus Baltus arriving, the men hurried inside and for a few minutes there was a constant shuffling of feet upon the stairs and across the bare floor of the kitchen.

Then succeeded a profound silence.

The domine stood near the cheap little coffin. Susanna sat in Janey's rocker at the head and beside her mother; the child looked wide-eyed and again there was the strained, interrogatory smile. She kept pulling a handkerchief like a ribbon back and forth between her hands. The serenity of her earlier impressions at the grave was disturbed. Why did every one look so unnatural, and why did Mrs. Vroom rock herself back and forth and sigh? A part of Janey was here, and was not a part in heaven? She glanced at the Storms. Saskia was regarding her with a curious, blinking gaze. But how grand that feather was on Saskia's bonnet and how splendid the color of her dress! She looked at Mr. Catherwood. He was resting his head on his hand. She suddenly drew near him in years. He was nothing but a big boy, after all. He glanced up and smiled at her. She smiled back and again she was comforted. She nestled her hand into her mother's, and Mrs. Kildare put a throb of love into her clasp which made Susanna lean against her as if with a sudden sense of sweet protection.

Many had expected to hear much of the terrors of death and the nearness of judgment from the domine, but, instead, he led them on that winter day forth into green fields and in sight of a tender Shepherd; and there were words of comfort for the stricken and a balm of hope for

the aged ; and childhood in its helplessness, and motherhood in its sacredness, were set before them as the precious things of life, and they were brought to see the home-coming of a little child to the bosom of eternal love as something too joyful and beautiful for interpretation, but reasonable for belief and consoling in bereavement.

And then again, there was a silence — broken only by the weeping, occasioned by the sight of little Janey, on whom mortality thus far had set no other seal than that of a sweet sleep.

Then the outside door was thrown open, the room began to empty, and a procession of men and women formed to walk the short distance to the knoll to which, early that morning, Nicholas Storm and Harry had shovelled a path. Thus carried out from the only roof which had sheltered her went Janey, borne tenderly by hard-working farmers and followed by mothers who knew as profoundly as her own mother the loss of a little one for whom they had suffered, rejoiced, hoped, and mourned.

Under those peaceful evergreens, neighborhood animosities, if briefly, were forgotten. While the sunlight poured in dazzling radiance upon the snow and upon that narrow little bed, the domine prayed, invoking the Holy Spirit. Hearts were quickened and thoughts were elevated, and thus in her death, as in her life, Janey became the occasion of blessing and a cause for thanksgiving.

CHAPTER XI

THE winter proved a memorable one. The snows were frequent and heavy. The January thaw filled the air with long-continued fog. There was a great freshet, followed by sudden freezing, then the deepest snow known for years. There were so few mild days that the cattle grew meagre from long housing and the faces of women white and expressionless.

The school was kept open under difficulty and the attendance was irregular and small.

Susanna plodded sturdily back and forth, but her walks were often relieved by lifts on Nicholas Storm's sled.

By February, Mr. Catherwood began to count the days till the end of the second term. His drifting life from house to house; his broken study beside kitchen tables where the atmosphere was laden with tobacco smoke and the accumulated odor from buckwheat cakes; his protracted chills in beds as cold as vaults, followed by disturbing dreams and scant slumber; his frost-bitten feet and hollow cheeks, — all told the story of the poor student trying to work his way through college. He became almost sick from longing for his former conditions of life. The wealth of the Dutch farmers was poverty to him. When he was over-tired, visions almost as vivid as the reality projected themselves, — the Harvard library; the clamor of life and stir of thought in Boston; the great bayed front and cheerful windows of an uncle's house on Beacon Street; the white paint and green blinds of his own home, shaded by elms as majestic in structure and as exquisite in beauty as Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn." He saw his mother's tea-table with its well-ordered service, his father's study with its goodly array of theological works, and the standard poets, essayists, and historians of English literature. His mother had

had but one silk dress since he could remember—but it was not too good for frequent wear. His father had brought up a family of four boys on eight hundred a year, but the stress had never been so great in the clergyman's home that a daily newspaper was suspended or new books ceased to be the chief purchase. It was true that the papers and the books after being read at home had been passed on to him—but what he was missing was companionship,—atmosphere. His real thoughts, his real hopes, his highest aspirations, he kept within himself till they threatened to choke either themselves or him. Occasionally, he discussed politics with old Egerton Brereton, but age is too dogmatic and youth too revolutionary, and there was always a hitch in the argument. The domine was grand on occasions, but, like a gale, wearing.

He kept in touch with Susanna, but, of necessity, although comforter, friend, and teacher, in one, to the little girl, she appealed to him chiefly as a child requiring a great deal of love and sympathy. He gave both, because of her need and because she impelled him, by a certain sensitiveness to impression and a large promise of talent backed by a pathetic lack of opportunity, to do all he could for her.

As the time drew near for him to go away, he was astonished at the tenacity with which she clung to him. Usually so studious, she let her book lie idly in her lap in school, while she watched him teach, reprove, or sit at his desk in busy idleness. She was always standing at some point where she could watch his first approach, and she would run to meet him, throwing her arms about him and then taking his hand and walking with a contented chatter by his side. There was an intensity in the isolation of her interest. He realized that his departure would be a poignant grief; for, after Janey's death, he had discovered that she was unlike most children in possessing a capacity for sorrow. He confided his anxiety concerning her future to the domine.

"I've been thinking of her, too," said the reverend gentleman, "and Madame Baltus has been thinking of her. We have been thinking of the whole family. They are like a rotten bridge, ready to tumble to pieces any moment for want of a bracing, and somebody is going to get drowned. We talk of driving across the country to

Hartford to attend the synod the last of March. Your quarter will be up, then, won't it? It has been in our minds to ask you to go along—to go home that way, I mean. It will save you the cost of an expensive journey and provide us with good company. Now, how'd it be to take Susanna, too? Mrs. Baltus wouldn't mind the care of her for a month."

The schoolmaster's whole face lighted up. "You are very kind. The money saved will be welcome to me, but a ride like that will be a luxury—and I shall be a debtor as regards good company."

"Tut, tut, your compliment is too neatly turned. If you'll go, we'll call it quits. But what do you think about Susanna?"

"I think well of it. I will make just one addition to your plan. Let her spend a part of the time with my mother."

"All right, I'll call on the Duttons this afternoon and try to make arrangements."

Meanwhile, the child's mother and grandmother had been talking over her welfare. Each knew the other's unspoken thought—that very soon she must be motherless, and it was wonderful with what dexterity and delicacy they avoided the fact and yet made themselves understood.

"I wish she had an aunt or uncle to whom we could send her for a visit."

"I wish she had," sighed her grandmother. "The change would do her good and you would feel relieved, too,—wouldn't you, Maggie?—in case of sudden illness."

"Yes!" and there would be a long pause. "I would like to have her remember me as I am now."

"The spring is always such a hard time for you! Oh, if we had only stayed in Connecticut!"

"My little daughter would have had friends and helpers then. But we have been away so long, we are forgotten."

And then both would remain silent, planning impossible things—each fearing lest her mother's death, following closely on Janey's, should prematurely sadden Susanna.

It happened, therefore, when the domine uttered his proposition, that he was somewhat astonished at the alacrity with which it was accepted. But he was a shrewd

man, and he presently became as vividly conscious as though she had told him that Mrs. Kildare knew her days were numbered. Her self-abnegation, under such circumstances, overcame him. In that moment of mental clairvoyance, he obtained a new idea of the sacrifice in all love, and she of the scope of his large tenderness.

As for Susanna, she could hardly realize the magnitude of her blessedness. She went about the house in a daze of expectation, but never able to project the future beyond the moment of entering the domine's carriage and sitting on the back seat beside Madame Baltus.

There was a great deal of extra sewing, and the child noticed one day the work drop from her mother's hands. Mrs. Kildare began to cough and there was a bright red spot on her handkerchief, afterward.

But, finally, the morning for the journey came, — mild, sunny, with a warm dry wind blowing from the south, and the world looking wide-awake and expectant.

Susanna stood by the window ready and waiting, pressing as near the pane as she dared, but somewhat hindered by a stiff, shirred silk bonnet with a ruche around the face dotted with pink rosebuds. She felt very grand. When the carriage appeared in sight, she jumped up and down with delight.

"See, grandma — see the fine lamps and the two horses! I never rode behind two horses before! Oh-h!" and she gave a laughing scream. "There's Mr. Catherwood's little trunk fastened on behind. Where's my carpet-bag? Grandma, is my carpet-bag all ready?"

"Yes, yes, child," and the old lady laughed, momentarily partaking of her gayety.

"Susanna, darling, — quick — before they get here! Kiss me! put your arms around my neck — so!" and the dying mother folded her child passionately to her breast. And Susanna, though responding fondly, kept her eyes turned eagerly towards the door.

"Just one more kiss, precious!"

She gave it with another generous hug, but was struggling away, when again she saw a spot of blood on the handkerchief Mrs. Kildare was pressing to her lips.

"O, my dear mamma, did we squeeze each other so hard;" and laughing and impulsively caressing her mother's hand, she folded it to her breast for a moment;

the next instant she rushed to the door, throwing it wide open, her eyes sparkling, her face radiant with anticipation.

There was a hurried, cheery bustle. The immense carpet-bag, with its gay-flowered exterior and its stuffed interior, was stowed under the back seat. Mr. Catherwood lifted the little girl into the magnificent reality of that same back seat; there were more kisses, a profuse exchange of thanks and well-wishes, warm handshakings and good-bys, and then they rolled away.

As they passed beyond the shadow the gray house threw athwart the road, Susanna suddenly leaned out, her face, in its bower of roses, imbued with wistfulness. The mother was standing where her child had left her, with a majesty of attitude and a strange uplifted joy of expression as if she were a priestess offering sacrifice.



PART SECOND. — LATE SPRING

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CHAPTER I

ALTHOUGH more than six years have elapsed since Susanna's going forth into the world, yet those six years, measured by events, have formed but a brief interval.

The old house is grayer. The bridge leading to the gable of the barn reveals an impassable chasm over the cart-track below, and the sagging barnyard gate has disappeared. Many a shingle has dropped from the roof of the wood-house, its clapboards bulge, and it holds but an uncertain footing on its foundations.

The dooryard over the cellar kitchen exhibits depressions threatening to become pitfalls under the first heavy tread, and the scant soil offers but a sorry sustenance to the grass and flowers perpetuating a struggling existence from year to year. The locust copse indeed has shot up a sturdy growth, and the young trees, crowded together, make a thick shade for the rear of the house, concealing the door in the attic and casting a green gloom over the west window of the parlor.

Inside, there is more change. The door to the attic staircase no longer stands ajar night and day. Even the attic windows remain unopened weeks at a time. The loom has become a receptacle for odds and ends. The plaster bust of Henry Clay is darkened with dust and cobwebs. The bees weave their magic circles as of yore, and drone and hum and hang new nests from the rafters, mingling a waspish odor with those of catnip and pennyroyal.

The parlor looks much as it did when the domine baptized the little girls, only there are no children to run back and forth over the red and white carpet. Every piece of furniture stands where it did, except the arm-chair, covered with haircloth, which is in the unused corner by the west window. The shades have lost some

of their freshness and brightness, the gilt of the mirror is spotted with tarnish. The room appears mutely to reproach its stillness and order. Clearly, if used at all, it is chiefly as a passageway, for there is the tell-tale musty odor lingering in apartments not daily ventilated and occupied. The doors of the two bedrooms are open, but no one is within.

As it is an August day, let us avoid the steep, dark stairs and enter the living-room from below. How beautiful the locusts are as we approach! Standing far apart, time has not stolen space from their gnarled, far-reaching branches. The stately trees cast a pleasant flicker of light and shade upon the turnpike, dusty and deeply cut as of yore. The buckboards are returning from the Hudson, and there comes Eben Van Tassel with the same horses and the same old sheepskin for a seat, but he no longer glances invitingly at the widow's, and no little girl runs out to catch a ride. But here we are in front of the house, and the door is wide open.

Ah, yes, there is Mrs. Dutton, and she must be expecting somebody; for she stands just within the porch, her hand over her eyes, looking up the road. Her hair is now very white, she has lost the appearance of portly, healthy age, and in her mien and expression there is the aspect of decrepitude and inactivity.

Where the bridge crosses the creek, there is a slight rise; above this, like a ship coming into view, appears a head and then a body, and, finally, poised upon the eminence stands a girl. And, like the owner of some rich craft whose lookout is at last rewarded with a sight of his goodly vessel, so Mrs. Dutton heaves a contented sigh, steps hastily within, and concludes her preparations for supper.

The table stands in the middle of the room; it is set for two, and, after the fashion of so many country homes where there are no men to conciliate, and no children to coax, it represents the minimum of effort and ascetic frugality. Bread and butter, a dish of fruit, a cup of tea, a boiled egg—it is soon prepared.

"Well, grandma!"

"Supper's ready."

"I must sit down and get cool, first. It is so hot!"

"There is no hurry," said the old lady, placing the

teapot on the hearth and coming over to Susanna, who had thrown herself on the door-sill and sat leaning against the jamb, fanning vigorously with her straw hat.

"Were the domine and Madame Baltus at home?"

"Yes; and it is true!"

"You mean he did receive the call?"

"Received it—and accepted it, last week!"

"I don't suppose they will go before spring—I don't see how they can. Spring is a long way off, Susanna."

"They are going just as soon as they can get ready."

"It had to be," replied Mrs. Dutton, with conviction. "The only wonder is, he was not discovered long ago. But from a country district like this to New York is a big leap. The domine is getting old."

"He says it is a small church and in a poor neighborhood—and he says he wouldn't go if he didn't feel there was a work for him there. Then, too, he thinks a new minister will do better here. The quarrymen and farmers are so used to him, he can't stir them up or frighten them any more. We have seen that for some time ourselves, grandma."

"The change is timely, no doubt, for him, and perhaps for the church, too; but for you and me, Susanna, when Domine Baltus goes, our last hold on the outside world departs. We shall lose our best friend."

"There may come a call for us—who knows!—I'm ready for supper, now," and she sprang to her feet as if resolutely shaking off a dogging fear.

In speaking to the old lady, her tone was gentler than her look, and there was a lingering tenderness in her touch as she rested her hand a moment on her grandmother's white hair.

She sat down, her chin slightly elevated, as she glanced over the repast. Evidently, it seemed inadequate to her appetite, but she said nothing. The girl and the woman were at war with each other in every turn of her body and pose of her head, but she filled the old kitchen with light and bloom. Her presence was imbued with intense vitality. Her glance was buoyant and she presently brought back as if by reflection a cheerfulness of tone and manner in her companion.

They idled over the table, their talk full of the minute speculation concerning the domine growing out of a life

with few incidents; the queries and comments continued as they washed the dishes together. When the task was completed, the sun was only just sinking behind the mountains and there was still an hour before dark.

"We might walk up to the knoll, grandma, to say good night to the rest of us. You have not been out to-day — and, perhaps, when we come back, you will feel like looking over the papers."

"Perhaps."

An occasional katydid was tuning its youthful notes as they walked under the locusts, the old lady's arm in that of the tall girl beside her. They made one of those ultra-neutral pictures dotted by country women over a landscape, — their calico dresses taking on the hues of earth, of the bark of trees, of the grayness of the twilight, as if some defensive instinct, akin to that of the humming-bird or wild animal, had taught them to blend their very aspect in harmony with nature.

The dew was beginning to fall and the light to wane. A vast orchestra of frogs filled space with a shrill yet muffled monotone of loneliness. Under the treble nocturne played the threnodial melody of the creek.

Sancho had followed for a little way, his step sedate, his tail faintly wagging at rare intervals; he was growing old, and hearing the rolling of the shale on the mountain road down which Celinda was coming from pasture with the milking, he turned back to loll on the flags in front of the doorstep and catch the flies still wheeling in the lifeless August atmosphere.

Thus deserted, the only two left of the varied family whose number and need had once made a perpetual bustle about the old gray house, they walked on silently together, crossing the bridge and turning into the field, white with snow when Mr. Catherwood made Janey's grave, and thence on to the knoll where the pine trees stood grouped in cloistral dignity. A faint whispering was audible in their branches, although there was no perceptible motion; the gathering dampness saturated the air with pungent, dreamy perfume. Cones, still green, lay in great profusion on the ground, some shapely, others showing nothing but the core with an asparagus-like tip, aromatic and withering, the wasteful spoil of the chipmunks, now uttering warning chirps and chuckles as their haunt was

invaded. The red needles falling as silently year by year as the snow, and undisturbed by careless feet, had piled a thick, even covering over the earth and upon two of the three mounds occupying the central space. The third, newly made, showed bare and alien, and it was beside this they paused.

There were no tears in Mrs. Dutton's eyes, and Susanna's, too, were only serious and gently thoughtful, for the memory of a life reaching far beyond the allotted span is not cherished with a sense of poignant loss; such a life bears rather from those left behind a God-speed into the great and mysterious unknown and it gradually returns to their cheerful revery clothed with the strength and usefulness of its prime. Mrs. Dutton, across the border of threescore and ten, felt chiefly like the next sentinel stationed at the farthest outpost and the time not distant when she, too, would receive the password and finish her patrol.

"Good night, little Janey," said Susanna. "We come often, mamma," and she knelt, laying her head reverently on the central mound. "You are not alone, poor, old, deaf grandpa—and you hear now, don't you!—I'm going to make a prayer, grandma.—O God, dear heavenly Father, tell them we do not forget, and give them our faithful love, this night—grandma's and mine."

"You always were a great one for praying," said the old lady, smiling. "Keep it up as long as you can."

"It was you taught me, I am sure," and the girl looked at her wonderingly. "You pray, too!"

"Oh, yes, child, it seems to me I am praying the whole time, but in a different way—a different way. Mine is just a kind of waiting on God. I don't seem to have anything to say."

"Don't you ask him for what you want?"

"I don't want anything any more enough to ask for it."

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Susanna, with heartfelt commiseration.

When they reached the house again, Celinda was standing in the doorway, waiting for their return in order to go home.

"Have you eaten your supper, Celinda?"

"I took a bite'm. I'm in a hurry to-night."

"Well, go right along. It will be pitch dark before

you get through the woods. I shall feel relieved when you are moved down."

"Yaas'm. I thought I never could leave de cabin Harry set up wid his own hands fer me. But it's mighty lonesome, up dar, nights, after all! I thought, sence he persisted to have his grave on his own plantation like, it wuz becomin' in de wife his own hard airnens bought into freedom, to hang around whar he's a-lyin'. I never did hev no hankerin' after graveyards, dough; and now I've got one of my own, it ain't no ways differ'nt wid me. And den I says to myself, 'My Harry ain't thar! My Harry's in heben, he is!' I'll move down de fust of September, sure!"

"The sooner the better, Celinda. Susanna and I are lonesome, too. Did you skim the milk?"

"Yaas'm. De wood's in de fireplace, de barn's shet up, and de emptyin's set."

"Hurry away, then."

The companions, so diverse in years, sat on the doorstep. The coolness began to steal down from the mountains and up from the creek. The solitude was so immense that they seemed to possess the earth.

"I've never felt at home here, Susanna. It seems to me I know just how the children of Israel felt when they hung their harps on the willows and sat down and wept. But if we had the means, I often wonder if I should have the energy to change our place of living now. I'm lonesome enough, God knows, but it is a lonesomeness nothing could help. I guess the world is a lonesome place for old people wherever they are."

"You miss grandfather. That's what's the matter, grandma. But you've got me, haven't you?" She put her arm protectingly around the old woman. "I feel at home here," she continued, as if aloud to herself. "Oh, when I get a letter from Mr. Catherwood, I have a kind of longing for the big houses and the fine ways of those people I met when I made the visit — but I am all over it the next day. I liked the manners and the soft voices and the language. It sometimes appears to me as if every sound I hear is a tongue. I'd like to talk well. I'd like to talk the whole time like Mr. Irving in the Knickerbockers. Mr. Catherwood had a fine way of talking, hadn't he, grandma? It was better than the singing

in church to me." Her tones and cadences grew musical as she continued. Her voice vibrated with a resonant, rich quality.

Mrs. Dutton sighed. "It's no wonder. Your mother was that way and so was your grandfather. I've seen them wince under voices as if they had been cut with a knife." She sighed again. "Your future is hidden from me, child. You will never have your proper chances, for all I see; but you are young! I want to impress one thing upon you—if you should ever be alone, go away!"

"Where'd I go?"

"I don't know—but you'd better go!"

"I'd have to come back often," said the girl, with determination. "There are Mrs. Storm and Nick and the Vrooms and the Van Voorhies. They're such good friends! I shall love them as long as I live! I suppose I might get used to a new place and new people, but as far as I am concerned, I would like to stay here forever. I couldn't get educated here,"—and her voice became speculative,— "but then I could come back, after I did get educated. Anyway, it doesn't matter, here, if I do know only a little! What'd I do without the mountains and the creek and the farm, grandma? And there's the knoll, too!"

"Well, you don't have to go to-day or to-morrow. All I say is, if you are left alone, you must leave. You'll not have me always."

"But ever and ever so long yet, grandma. You and I are going to live on here where the rest of us did for a long time yet. Perhaps I can find some way to earn a little money to buy books with, and if you see me educating myself you won't worry about my having so little schooling. Come! Let's go up-stairs and look over those papers."

"Not to-night. I dread the worst. I used to walk ahead to meet trouble, dear, but I don't do so any longer. I seem changed even to myself. I used to hug the fancy that father had a nest-egg, but, the last two years, as he didn't give me a cent, what he had must have been used up—and yet—I don't want to know that it is really so. That is why I delay looking over those papers. He was such a generous, kind man once; but with the reverses overtaking your own father and Mr. Dutton, he got scared

lest the trifle he said he'd saved would go the way of all the rest. I'm sure he gave us what he could. Why, Susanna, the poor old man never bought a stitch of clothing after we came here!"

"But see what a lot he had! I'm sure, grandma, no one needs new things till the old ones are worn out!"

Her grandmother regarded her with a long, searching stare, as if this last remark revealed a depth of simplicity and ignorance incomprehensible. The girl in her turn understood that she had said something not commendable.

"Why didn't you find out what you wanted to know before he died, grandma? Why didn't you speak right out and tell him what you thought?"

She shook her head discouragingly. "He was always close-mouthed, your grandfather was. I might have looked through his desk, seeing he was so old, but as long as he kept his faculties I could never bring myself to do it. His mind was strong to the last; that is what good stock means! Sometimes, when I have been under temptation, especially when your mother was alive and needing so many things, I've gone as far as father's desk in the dead of night, but I could never go any further. If there is money, I said to myself, it's his; and he has his senses and sees Maggie's need, and he'd help her if he could—and so there isn't money! Then was the time I prayed for something! I've stood by that desk in sore straits many and many a night, praying, 'Lord, deliver me from temptation!'"

Susanna squeezed her hand. "Shall we go up-stairs now, after all, and look, grandma?"

"To-morrow night, child. To-morrow night will do. See, the moon is coming up. It does look pretty here in moonlight. We will sit a while longer and then we will go to bed. I want to get up early, for Celinda is going to make blackberry jelly—it's so good in case of sickness."

CHAPTER II

By the following morning, Susanna had arrived at a decision.

Although Mr. Brereton had been dead a month, his room continued untouched. The door into the parlor stood ajar, but the one communicating with Mrs. Dutton's chamber remained locked.

The stir of life and vigor in the young girl was strong; the love of sunshine and wind and bustle was part of her youth. While the jelly-making was going on downstairs, therefore, she began to pull things to pieces upstairs. She threw the parlor wide open and raised the windows of the old man's chamber. As the light flooded the rooms and the sweet odors from trees and grass came stealing in, blended with the faint, pure fragrance of the forest, the unnatural gloom which had seemed to brood over the house disappeared. The furniture of the unoccupied chamber, as well as a row of garments hanging on some wooden pegs just below the ceiling, assumed a prosaic aspect. The window overlooking the orchard was so low that she could step in and out at will, and on a line strung from one apple tree to another she soon had a motley assortment of clothing dangling in the wind. The huge four-poster, the valance of which still showed the rumpling of its late tenant, next confronted her. As she began to unmake the bed, she felt as if a small, shrunken, bald head and wizened ivory face would suddenly confront her. But she kept bravely on, dragging the heavy feather ticks by main force out of the window and spreading them in the sun. And there was the canopy with its Canton calico drapery! It must all come down — all! and she fussed and pulled and ripped, until the curtains lay in a heap on the floor, and the frame looked like the dismantled skeleton of a ship. She worked stealthily, afraid of interruption; but the cham-

ber was over the one Mr. Catherwood had occupied, and the commotion did not reach the absorbed attention of the busy women. Gathering up the draperies, she carried them to the attic, and here a wave of retrospection swept over her. But memory is a weakling with the young; the present is all-powerful. Springing away from the old loom on which she had sat, she turned back; for the heavy bed remained to uncord, and the posts and side pieces to haul through the window ready for Celinda to take to the creek and wash. The rest of the furniture was moved into the adjoining chamber, the rag carpet was thrown out on the grass, and, finally, nothing was left but four, staring, whitewashed walls and an ancient secretary appearing forlorn and incongruous with its inlaid surface, its high, diamond-panelled doors and mahogany frame clouded and purpled for want of polish. Neglected-looking as it was, it seemed to confront her inquisitive stare with one of defiance and reproof.

But, as her intention was simply to force a situation on her grandmother, she left the desk standing where she had pushed it and began to clean the room.

When, however, the walls were swept down, the paint and floor scrubbed, and the windows washed, a new idea seized her. Why could not she have a room to herself? Such a consummation seemed one minute a luxury beyond her wildest dreams, but, the next, the fascination of it bore down with mighty force. Some of her former freedom in the attic at night would be restored. She fancied herself lying in the moonlight with her face towards the orchard, looking through the low window at the shimmer of the hoar frost on the grass. She might even step outside, if the mood seized her, and wander under the apple trees before going to bed.

Towards noon, when there was a varied collection of cups without handles, chipped bowls, goblets with the standards broken off, and a scarred assortment generally of receptacles filled with jelly standing in the sun to harden, Mrs. Dutton toiled wearily up-stairs.

Susanna heard her coming with some timidity, realizing for the first time the temerity of her proceedings. But when the old lady stepped into her own crowded chamber and saw the girl standing in the middle of the

other room, whose bare wet floor and smell of soap told the whole story, a look of immense relief stole over her countenance.

"Why, my dear, how did you come to think of doing it? I have been dreading it night and day. How did you manage alone with all those heavy things? And father's clothing airing so nicely, too!" as she walked inside and towards the windows. "You have lifted a burden from my shoulders. It would make a nice room for you, don't you think so, Susanna?" and she regarded her granddaughter eagerly and anxiously.

"Wouldn't you miss me when you lie awake, grandma?"

"I think the house wouldn't seem quite so forsaken if we spread around more. There has always been one of us in here, you know, and we could keep the door open again,"—she began wiping her eyes,—“and you are young and need your rest—and I snore and puff so nights! I even waken myself with it, and what must it be for you!”

"Well, grandma, since you think it would be nice, I do, too."

"You wouldn't be afraid, would you?"

"Afraid of what?" and her eyes, wide open, seemed to dominate the situation.

"Just the lonesomeness—that's all."

"We'll get used to it again. We did before." In the girlish voice there was a slight trembling, made up of sympathy and a vivid appreciation of their mutual dependence and isolation.

"Celinda and I will help you put things in order. We will keep a light burning in the parlor, after this, nights, and it will seem as it used to when I was up and down with somebody always ailing."

"And will you look through the secretary, grandma, this evening, and let me have the key to the books? Grandpa got so afraid I would injure them, I haven't read in them in ever so long."

"They are yours now. You must never part with that desk, dear."

"We will go over the papers to-night, won't we, grandma?" and she put her arms coaxingly around the old lady.

"Oh, you are so persistent! Well, then, we will!"

Thus encouraged, she renewed her task with enthusiasm, and when the sun was setting, and the belated supper tempting her olfactories with a sturdier fragrance than usual, the green paper shades were in their place, and the rag carpet, shaken, cleaned, and brighter than it had been in many a day, covered the floor if not with beauty with homely comfort. The ancient secretary was pushed back into the corner between the windows, and the girl anticipated the moment when she could handle the books once more and polish the mahogany till it shone like the furniture in the domine's parlor.

It appeared that Mrs. Dutton required no further urging; for, as soon as Celinda went home, the kitchen curtains were pulled down, the heavy weights of the clock were laboriously wound, the bars were put across the upper and lower halves of the door, the fire on the deep hearth was covered, and handing one candle to Susanna and taking another herself, she drew a sigh, blending relief and apprehension, and began to ascend the stairs.

Perhaps it was the airing the neglected rooms had received, perhaps it was the animation in Susanna's mien, but the house for the first time in many days looked awake. The walls and furniture, which for so many years had held unbroken fellowship, might have seemed to an alert fancy to be in subtle conference and endowed with reminiscence and prophecy. The girl, at least, thought the polished haircloth of Mr. Brereton's chair took on a tell-tale look, and that his portrait followed their steps as if it were aware of their intention and sympathetic to whatever the secretary contained. In the flickering, mellow candlelight, the frame of the mirror shone with its old-time lustre, and the vibration of Mrs. Dutton's heavy step awoke the chimes in the candelabra. Susanna became radiantly cheerful and expectant, but, indeed, as she led the way into the room hereafter to be hers, the fine, dainty freedom of her step told of an affluence of vigorous life requiring little extraneous influence.

She had set a spider-leg table beside the secretary, and on this she placed the candles. She turned the chair in front of the desk invitingly aside as the old lady fumbled confusedly in her pocket, drawing out a bunch of keys.

"It has such a lot of nooks and drawers, and father was such a hand for saving every scrap of paper. I expect it will take us till midnight to just look over things, not to speak of reading anything. I suppose there are accounts and letters here running back over a hundred years. The desk belonged to my grandfather first, and father was born before the Revolution. It is time it was overhauled, but I used to think Maggie would be the one to do it. I'll open the desk part first, so as to have a place to lay things. Bring a sheet and spread on the floor where we can put papers that seem useless, but so as to save them and give them a thorough examination later. We want to be careful not to throw anything away at first sight."

She brought the sheet and stood eagerly observant as the beige-lined doors were opened, exposing the books, forty or fifty in all, and below them compartments and drawers.

Every nook was crowded to repletion, but there was no confusion. Letters were filed and dated, easy for reference, and packages crisp and yellow with age were in as perfect order as more recent ones. The varied and faded handwritings bearing the unmistakable stamp of by-gone times filled her fancy with an eery romantic sense of remoteness.

"Put these in the sheet. They are father's love-letters. See, the package says, 'Writ in 1789 to Margery Woodbury, afterward my true wife.'"

"You wouldn't throw those away, would you, grandma?"

"I suppose they had better be burned."

"Oh, let me keep them! Please let me keep them and read them!"

"I don't suppose it would do any harm. I don't suppose they would care now, if they knew. But it isn't time for you to understand such things yet. You are only a little girl."

Susanna regarded her with contradictory amazement, but made no reply.

"Here's the rest — the package she kept. Mother died young, poor thing!" Mrs. Dutton sighed, and her spectacles becoming suddenly blurred, she took them off, rubbing them absent-mindedly. "What does it say?"

handing the letters to Susanna. "The writing is so small and fine it hurts my eyes to try to read it."

"Letters writ to me in 1789 by Egerton Brereton, now my husband. A noble, generous, and God-fearing man."

"There, I told you he was generous, and he was. If he seemed to get stingy, Susanna, it was just because he was careful. Here are letters from England. And here are some more from France. And here are some from Ensign Ashton — he was ensign in the Pequot War. And here are some more from Uncle Aaron — he was in the War of 1812. He was impressed and shut up in the tower of London."

She drew open another drawer. "Here's a package marked 1760. They seem to be from Geoffrey Clinton. He was president of the council when Connecticut was a province. Here are some from him when he was governor. They are all your own people, Susanna, who have written these letters."

"Then I am going to read them."

"Here seem to be later ones. They were written when I was a little girl. Be sure to make separate heaps as I open the drawers. Father had a meaning, assorting them in this way. He'd sit and sit and read and read and sigh and sigh at this desk when we first came here, till I would get nearly distracted — and then, all at once, he shut it up and never opened it except to write a letter to go by the semi-weekly post or put away a paper. He did not show me his papers, though, for more than ten years. I dare say he had his reasons. It is a kind of reassuring comfort, dear, though I am sure I don't know why, what Margery Woodbury, my mother, said of him. And it was true! I ought never to have minded when father was trying like — after he got — so old. It was hard enough for him to live on and on. Real old folks always are very secretive or else they tell everything. I never want to live to be old, Susanna."

The young girl had sat down on the floor as the heaps accumulated, fancy and curiosity alert, while she arranged and rearranged the little piles. She was only half hearing Mrs. Dutton. The mingled strain of loyalty and self-reproach fell upon dull ears, for she was too young to qualify her judgments and her complex perceptions were still few. To her, selfishness was selfishness, and

her recent memories of querulousness and secretiveness rose like a sand dune, concealing the earlier ones of companionship. A long silence made her look up.

Mrs. Dutton sat bent over, holding an open paper between the candles. Every wrinkle in her aged face showed like the furrows of ploughed land under a clear sky. She was biting her lips nervously, an expression of incredulity and greedy hope sharpening her features.

"What is it, grandma?"

"It is a deed."

"What's a deed?"

"A title."

"What's that?"

"O my child, how ignorant you are!" and she glanced with unaccustomed severity over her spectacles, resuming her examination.

Susanna sprang to her feet and read over her grandmother's shoulder.

The legal phraseology, circuitous, involved, and formal, gave her an exalted idea of deeds. But, as she read on, a clearer notion of the contents of the paper took possession of her faculties than her years and simplicity would seem to warrant. She raised her head eagerly, pushing back her curly hair. Her eyes shone.

"Grandma," she exclaimed, "the paper says grandpa owns a piece of land in New York. It is clear to me it says just that. Don't you understand?" and she craned her face beaming with joy close to that of her companion.

"Where did he get the money to buy it with, Susanna?"

"I don't know. He must have had it all the time," she replied, with ready optimism.

"It is what I don't like to think. I can't bear to think it, — and my Maggie needing almost everything and you growing up like a woodchopper. O father, father!"

Susanna drew herself erect. She stood off from her grandmother a little way. A new, true, keen perception of the final, everlasting value of character dawned upon her. The hope in that aged countenance had yielded to the solicitude of maternity, and sternness and dignity set a stamp upon it which made the girl see for the first time the moulding influence of love and principle.

"Grandpa didn't use it for himself, grandma. He was saving it for you. You wanted it for mamma, but grandpa wanted it for you."

"Perhaps, perhaps. I hope so. But to save for the sake of saving, to hoard when those near and dear to you are wanting and suffering—it always did seem to me the meanest thing on earth, and what I thought none of our kith and kin capable of. If he had only used it on himself!"

"Will it make things a little easier, grandma?"

"If it is true, it will—and I suppose it is true. Father always kind of distrusted your father," she continued, reminiscence setting in again with a full tide. "There was a roving element in your father's nature, and I suppose when he brought us here to this wilderness, my father concealed his real circumstances to a certain extent. He used to say he had only a trifle left—and perhaps that is what he thought at first. Dear, dear!"—and a new energy began to assert itself. "It will change everything for you, child, if it is true. Poor father, he didn't expect to live so long. Poor old man—that was his idea. He knew the hardest time of all for Maggie and me would be when the children were growing up and we could not do for them as we had been done by. And then of late, he did not care. He was too old to care. I suppose those days when he used to catch a ride to the county town, he attended to these things. I never suspected. He kept nagging me so to save, save, and God knows, dear, it has been nothing but save and patch and darn and go without ever since you can remember. If I had had just myself to do for, I would have given up long ago."

Susanna put her arm protectingly around her grandmother. "Have you come to the end of the papers?" she inquired.

"The end! See here and here and here!" pulling out one drawer after another with feverish haste.

"Well, let's go on—I'm not sleepy. Nothing so exciting has ever happened to me before." She threw herself on the floor beside the sheet. "Give me some more, grandma."

The emptying and assorting began again, till the desk wore the aspect of a house whose occupants have just

moved out. The doors with their green linings hung ajar. Drawers wide open and others half closed revealed vacancy. Mrs. Dutton was wearily peeping into them for the last time to see if anything had been overlooked, when a rattling on the bare surface of one attracted her attention.

She pulled it out, and there in diminutive loneliness lay a tiny key. She caught at it eagerly, holding it up against the light, and a flash of recognition illuminated her face. "I remember this key," she exclaimed emphatically. "It fits a slide somewhere. It is fifty years since I saw it. Help me take the drawers out."

Drawer after drawer was examined without success. They were gone over a second time. No secret partition could be found. The old lady's hands dropped wearily in her lap. The clock in the kitchen solemnly told off twelve strokes.

"Why, it is midnight, grandma! I never sat up so late before." She glanced around the room and down at the sheet in amazement. "Something is happening at last!" she exclaimed, yawning as she spoke.

"I can't do any more to-night," exclaimed Mrs. Dutton. "I am tired out. I don't know what to do with this key. We shall lose it before we know it."

"I'll run it on a string and tie it around my neck, grandma. That's what Saskia Storm does to the key of her big chest."

"Well, tie the string in a twisted knot," replied her grandmother, an amused smile flickering over her harassed countenance.

The house was soon enveloped in silence and darkness. All the nocturnal sounds had ceased except the hoarse contradictions of the katydids, and these were assuming an intermittent vivacity. Susanna lay straight and still beside her grandmother in the maple four-poster where they had slept together since her mother's death. She lay with staring eyes thinking over the novel phraseology of the deed and softly repeating passages to herself. She read in anticipation those files of letters from foreign lands. She speculated over the nature of the changes altered circumstances might bring—and chiefly they took on the more abundant farm and domestic outfit of the Storms. Should she ever possess

a purple silk gown like Saskia's ? and a bonnet with a weeping feather ? Would their fallow lands smile again with golden, waving wheat, with potatoes as lovely in their dark green hue as a cedar in the far distance decked with the bloom of its aromatic berries, with oats shimmering in silver and gold and bronze when ripening in the torrid heat of July, with corn with a yellow film as if the bees of the whole world had sifted pollen on the swaying stalks ? And then misty pictures, formed of half-forgotten rooms and incidents and people connected with her visit, floated before her mind, and her anticipations from her own point of view assumed a splendor and dignity making her cheeks burn with the audacity of her conceits. And, finally, she fell asleep, her fingers clutching the precious key, while gentle dreams of her mother and Janey and of her grandfather sitting beside the creek in the cool afternoon shadows while she read aloud the *National Era*, replaced the changing pictures of her youthful fancy.

She wakened at daybreak and, slipping out of bed, stole cautiously into the next room, its darkness restoring the sensation of Egerton Brereton's presence. But the old secretary stood demurely where they had shoved it by main force the day before ; the letters still lay exposed in orderly confusion on the sheet. The bed, uncorded, was piled in a corner. Yes, this was the room she had cleaned. This was the furniture it had taken every particle of her young strength to pull apart. This was henceforth her room. Thus do the young, without intention, without unnatural envy, without unseemly haste, encroach upon the old. Thus does the earth perpetually renew its youth, its beauty, and its interest. A growing sense of importance, of maturity, took possession of her. She drew up the curtains. She opened a window. How fragrant the dewy grass was ! How awake and alive was everything ! A rooster crowed with dominating egotism. A turkey gobbled. Afar, through the damp, sweet air came the discordant, melancholy cry of Saskia's peacock. Busy insects were already setting their looms awhir. There was the soft thud of an apple falling from a high branch.

She turned to the secretary and opened the doors, reading over the titles of the books. In the penetrating morning light, she saw how dusty they were. A spider's

web hung raggedly over the edges of the volumes on the top row. She forgot about the slide. The mania of house-cleaning swept over her. She began to take the books out cautiously lest the dust set free should mar the immaculate purity of the furniture so laboriously polished. Finally, they all lay on the rim of the outspread sheet. The shelves, empty and with a thick ridge of dust on the back, showed ugly and lonesome. She began to draw them from their grooves, and, as she did so, drop them out of the window to the ground. The end of one slipped a little from her grasp, and, as she caught at it, sending up a shower of ancient dust, it turned — and there, in the middle of the side which had rested against the back of the secretary, she saw a tiny keyhole.

She forgot her housewifely cares. Her sweet impressions of the morning vanished. Resting the shelf across a chair, she tugged excitedly at the key around her neck, exclaiming impatiently against the twisted knot. All at once she smiled, realizing that she had only to slip the cord over her head. She trembled with excitement as the key fitted into the minute orifice and opened a shallow drawer, so shallow that it was filled to the rim with the yellow envelope exposed to view.

She stood a moment irresolute. There was her grandfather's writing and there was her grandmother's name, and all looking quite fresh and recent. She stole with the drawer and its contents into the adjoining room.

Mrs. Dutton was still asleep. How aged and tired and sad she looked! Her face stamped itself on Susanna's memory. The whitewashed wall and the maple head-board stared in the strong daylight with garish brilliancy. The wide ruffle of the old lady's nightcap drooped in rumpled flimsiness over her gray hair, which the heat and moisture had curled about her temples as if in mockery of their knotted, thread-like veins. Her mouth drooped at the corners, and her cheeks, thin and flabby, were wan and covered with fine wrinkles. A great wave of pitying love swept over the girl, and with it an eery apprehension of the time when she too would be burdened with years; but the forecast vanished as quickly as it came, for she was young!

"Grandma," she whispered, kneeling beside the bed, "grandma, see here!"

Mrs. Dutton sighed, as if it were a habit to do so, and opened her eyes, bleared and dim with sleep and exhaustion. "What time is it?" she exclaimed with a start and sitting bolt upright, heedless of Susanna. "Have I overslept? There is so much to do to-day."

"No, grandma, you haven't overslept," she said coaxingly. "It's early, real early — only five o'clock!"

"Is that all! I will take another nap, then," and, wearily closing her eyes, she prepared to lie down, when Susanna, jerking her hand violently, said, "Grandma, do look, please look!" and she put the tiny drawer close to Mrs. Dutton's face.

"Why didn't you tell me the first thing?" she exclaimed, startled, wide awake, and color and energy and the refreshment of expectation making her suddenly look ten years younger. "Where did you find it?"

She told her story.

"We'll go into the parlor," and leading the way, treading heavily along in her bare feet, she sat down in Eger-ton Brereton's armchair, while Susanna, raising the curtain and the window, let in the soft green light from the locust copse.

"Bring my specs and my carpet slippers."

She obeyed, and, in addition, drew up an ancient ottoman on which she sank expectantly.

Mrs. Dutton opened the envelope in silence, the girl resting her chin on her palms and watching the process. The widow read on and on, indignation, tenderness, and relief sweeping over her face in rapid alternation.

"Grandma, I'm here," at length said Susanna, with pleading sweetness.

The old lady drew off her spectacles, sighing heavily.

"I forgot all about you, dear, — forgot where I was, even. It is so strange, I can hardly take it in. There is a will — and there is a letter — and they are both father's."

The girl nodded, her manner inviting further confidence.

"I used to think it foolish in father, dear, to fill your head with tales of family greatness and especially when there was nothing to back it. I thought it more than likely you would have to live and die just where you are. But father had other ambitions for you, which his letter sets forth in detail. He seemed to love you better from the

very beginning than Maggie. That kind of hurt me, but then I would always say to myself — 'Susanna's Maggie's child.' Well, he has been hoarding all these years when we have been going without, and hoarding for you — so he says — and he says," she continued, wiping her eyes, "he says it was hard for me — but that he knew you were the apple of my eyes, too — as you are! But, O Susanna! if he had just trusted me — and divided a little with me when your mother was dying — and afterward — when I broke for a while — and the work was so hard! If the love of money and power once takes possession of men, it seems to crush out of them everything fine and tender."

"I don't want what he's left me. I don't like him. Grandpa, do you hear? I don't like you," and the girl stared at the old man's picture, an anomaly of elegance in its time-worn and meagre surroundings.

"It is true he has left it to me, but with an entail. The main part is to remain invested till you are of age. He says that when we first came here he did not think there would be very much, but that the unimproved land he bought in New York became valuable. There appears to be a good deal of property of various kinds from the will, but I'll have to see a lawyer."

Susanna picked up the envelope which had fallen on the floor. Half her pleasure was gone, because she saw her grandmother's feelings were under a strain. She held up the envelope to read the superscription once more. As she did so, the light struck it, revealing a thin piece of paper within.

She drew it out. It proved to be a later will, although a holograph one. The date was only a year old. She began reading it aloud.

"I, Egerton Brereton, although of great age, being ninety-three this day, but of sound mind, do will and bequeath, without proviso or stipulation, to my dearly beloved and tenderly faithful daughter, Merciful Brereton Dutton, all my earthly goods, real and personal, of whatsoever description I may die possessed, commending to her the welfare and worldly furtherance of my great-granddaughter, Susanna Vere Brereton Kildare, and adjuring her that she train Susanna to a due sense of honorable lineage as conservative of character and a

laudable ambition, also to an honest pride of mind and character, but, above and beyond all else, to a profound reliance on God the Father of mercies, who in adversity as well as prosperity is the caretaker of them that fear him. And this later will, as supplementary to my first of date, is for a testimony to the great love I have always borne and ever shall bear for my faithful daughter, Merciful Brereton Dutton.'"

"O grandma, isn't it beautiful!" — and Susanna, turning to the portrait with a look of mingled reverence and affection, exclaimed, "I love you now, grandpa — I love you with all my heart!" The next instant, she realized that her grandmother was kneeling beside the old armchair.

What communion of spirit, what knitting closer of straining ties, what burial of harrowing memories, what new consecration of time and strength and love took place in that aged heart, who may say. But when she rose from her knees, her face had regained the strong serenity characteristic of it before her daughter's death.

"My mind is at rest," she said impressively. "I was sadly tormented, trying to justify injustice. The burden has been taken from my love. The Lord be praised!"

"Susanna," she said, an hour later, while they were eating breakfast, "there may be disappointments in store for us, favorable as things seem, so do not mention the papers or what they say till I give you leave. And until we know for certain, I hope you will show your good sense in being just as industrious and saving as we have always had to be since before you were born."

CHAPTER III

IN the course of the day, Susanna's chamber, in some indefinable manner, assumed the look of youth. Whether it was the fresh coat of whitewash Celinda gave it, whether it was the polish on the secretary which restored the piece of old-time grandeur, or whether it was the dreamy flapping back and forth of the clean, coarse muslin curtains, matters not. There was, indeed, a scanty row of dresses, hanging from the wooden pegs, which told their own story; but there was a taut physiognomy about the tightly corded bed also, as if it were to bear not only a slender but an elastic weight; and there was a touch of ornament about the fireplace filled with evergreens and about the mantel where stood two elaborate and clumsy vases glued over with small pine cones from which bunches of dried grass waved in the breeze laden with the champagne fragrance of apples ripening in the orchard.

After supper, Celinda drove the cows down from pasture. Usually, they were left to spend the night under the pine trees; but the evenings were coming on cool and the shortening days made the milking on the edge of the forest lonesome. The change from the summer habit brought with it the suggestion of autumn, although the sun was setting in a tender sky and the luxuriance of vegetation had not begun to wane.

"I'll milk to-night," said Susanna, desirous of some vent for the activity of her spirit. "There is never enough to do to suit me."

A black lamb kept tangling itself under her feet as she went towards the barnyard, now overgrown with the season's weeds. The cows had gathered in a corner under an oak tree just within the stone wall dividing the Dutton place from the Storm farm. Sauncho followed

his mistress leisurely, and a great tiger-cat with moon eyes rubbed against her dress, arching its tail and observant of the lamb. Beside the stone wall was a hutch of tame white rabbits, and these the young girl set loose before beginning the milking.

The voiceless little company of her friends, desirous chiefly of a share in her love, clustered about her as she came out of the barn with a three-legged stool. The rabbits looked up with expressionless, unwinking pink eyes, flaring and pointing their delicate ears, veined like the leaves of some splendid foliage plant, and nestled against her trustfully as she paused to caress them. Sancho, panting under a coat heavy enough for Arctic regions, sat smiling on his haunches while she talked soberly to him in a Ulysses strain of reflection and endearment. The cat went towards the cows and came back, looking impressively at her, as if to remind her that it was time to milk. But each was sober, trustful, and not over-anxious, and the young girl, as companioned and entertained as though her pets were lovers, sat down on her stool, Sancho's basin and tabby's bowl at hand, as well as the pails, and the lamb, which now began to bleat, tucked under her arm.

The staid red cow, which seemed to recognize her mission as foster mother, "histed" a leg.

"The motherless lamb first," said Susanna, majestically but reassuringly to Sancho and the cat sitting on either side of her, their gaze fixed imploringly but obediently on her face—"the poor little motherless lamb first"—and seizing one of the full teats, she directed a stream of creamy richness to the open mouth of the foundling. The operation proceeded with great dexterity on both sides, till the lamb, satisfied, closed its gentle eyes and nestled against her breast.

"Get down and run about—that's a good little lamb!" and, like a mother, she placed it deftly and firmly on its feet.

"The strongest last," she said, patting the dog and proceeding to fill tabby's bowl, and, presently, the cat, huddled into a dignified, comfortable heap, his velvet, tawny paws set close together, began daintily and neatly lapping his portion of the warm, rich fluid.

And, finally, when the dog, too, was busy with his evening meal, the girl commenced her work in earnest.

Under her firm grasp, the milk was pouring in even, thudding streams into the tin pail balanced between her knees, when a stone falling made her look up.

Nicholas Storm was leaning on the wall regarding her with a bashful look of wistful admiration.

"Hello, Nick, how long have you been there?"

"Long enough to see the hull feedin' process," he replied in indulgent tones.

She laughed, her color deepening, but returning his stare with another of various feminine subtleties while continuing the milking.

He leaped over the wall, his big, red, muscular hands serving him as props.

"What would your father say if he saw you on this side?" She glanced briefly at him, humor alone apparent in her tone.

"I'm a man!"

"That's news to me. How long?" surveying with studious deliberation the tall, angular figure, braced against the oak.

Nicholas showed himself restless under the examination, but met it with an obstinate, fixed stare at her upturned face etched upon the clear amber of the early twilight.

"What do you think about it yourself?" he inquired persistently.

"That you are the youngest man I ever saw."

"O pshaw, Susanna. I'll be twenty-one come Christmas"—and leaving the protection of the tree, he sauntered nearer, watching the milking with that sober and absent-minded gravity of demeanor only the countryman can manifest.

"Do you want to know what else I think?" she asked suddenly and thrusting back her hair, after giving the last few firm grips for the strippings. "I think you will be quite good-looking when you are twenty-five.—There, Cush!"—in a tone of finality, and taking a pail in either hand.

"That's encouragin', I'm sure. 'Tain't dark, yet. You needn't hurry in."

"I must. Celinda is waiting to set the milk."

"Pshaw!" replied he, again, but with a new inflection, indicative of amusement as well as protest. "Lemme carry the pails, then. They're too heavy for you."

She drew herself erect as if they were necessary weights, and he dared not repeat the offer.

"I'm real glad to see you again," she said with a shy, farewell dignity, looking over her shoulder as she walked away and leaving him standing in the middle of the barnyard. "I was wondering this morning where you kept yourself."

She went on steadily, after this, through the dilapidated gateway, its former posts still showing the hinges and latch lock, walking with a light, straight step, as though the milk were an easy burden borne with pleasure.

He lingered under the oak when she was out of sight, his sunbrowned face melancholy and brooding. Then he drove the forgotten rabbits into the hutch, as if they gave him an excuse for lingering, and leaping back over the wall, plunged into the corn which had rendered his approach invisible. Emerging near the hickories, he saw Saskia sitting on the handsome flagging of the porch leading to the "best" room. Her steady, scrutinizing stare irritated him. He turned off towards the kitchen door.

"Come here, Nick, I've got somethin' intrustin' to tell you."

He gave her a sceptical glance.

She tossed her head in the direction of the vast barns standing out redly in the clear air. "Faather's there an' Joris Vroom."

"Thet's no concern of mine," he replied doggedly, but his eyes shone with a feverish light and his shoulder gave an involuntary twitch. He went towards her and sat down, his hands on his knees, his gaze, obstinate and perplexed, directed to the mountains.

"I've ben listenin'."

"Thet's what you've always ben a-doin', Saskia, ever since I ken remember, an' I don't see es you get along any better'n other people."

"I done it fer you—an' this is my thanks. What'd you set down fer, 'cept to hear what I hev to say?"

"I don' know es I want to hear—certainly not ef there hes to be this everlastin' fussin' about it."

"You're always at swords'-p'int's with me, Nick, an' me your only sister. I wonder I put up with you, I do."

"You can't help yourself. There never has ben no

love wasted between you an' me, Saskia, an' never will be. I've ben waitin' all my life to hear you say somethin' noble, somethin' like my idee of a gentle, lovin' woman — but I don' s'pose I ever shall. 'Tain't in your blood."

"What you ben doin' out there in the corn?" she asked with sudden sharpness. "Huntin' field-mice? See any signs of a skinny creetur with long legs an' arms an' lookin' es poor an' lean es Jacob's kine?"

"Ef you mean Susanna, I did — an' I mean to see her jes' es often es I can. She's the kind of a girl, an' the only kind, to make a man's heart feel es ef it was a-famishin'. I'd like to be the ground she walks on."

"She's likely to do jes' thet thing fer you. She's only a-waitin' her chance to grind you into the dust, an' you're a fool or you'd see it."

"I'll trust her fer upright intentions, Saskia. At least, she can talk about somethin' else than work an' savin' an' pinchin' an' scrimpin'. She's got feelin's, too, thet she ain't ashamed to show."

"Don't be so soft-hearted. You'll spend half your life, ef you go on this way, chasin' vanity, an' the other half a-repentin' of your foolishness. Here comes faather though, an' Joris. They look turrible pleased with themselves."

Saskia's strong point was her unvarying calmness. She was a ganglia of instincts untrammelled by emotion. Lean and sinewy, lithe and active, her perceptions were never at rest, and, if her hands were folded, it was simply better to observe whatever fell within the field of her own interests. She had the rudimentary instinct of family, and her brother's sordid welfare was a matter of genuine concern with her. Of his desires, she was profoundly and congenitally ignorant.

Nicholas rose and leaned against the house as the two men drew near. In the waning light, what was fine and manly in his aspect increased. He had shaken off the nervous irritation produced by his sister's words and manner. There was a sturdy and dignified resistance in his expression.

"Good evenin', Nicholas," said Mr. Vroom, holding out a fat and freckled hand, soft and warm.

The young man silently shook the extended member.

"Bring some candles to the best room, Saskia," said her father, solemnly.

Officially ready for an interview which she had foreseen, she threw the door, seldom unlocked, open, quickly lighting the candles she had already arranged.

Nicholas felt renewed irritation.

"We've no funder need fer you, Saskia, 'cept to tell Nicholas to come in," said her father, facetiously. "You're cut out fer a winter pippin, fur es I kin see."

"Fer which ther's always a market," said Joris, gallantly.

"An' they always fetches a good price," retorted Saskia, tartly.

"Here, Nicholas, my son," said Mr. Storm, with alarming affectionateness, "this way! Me an' Mr. Vroom hes business which relates to you. Take this cheer between us. — No need, Saskia, potterin' round so long." He held the door open for her into the next room — closing it after her and locking it and hanging his bandanna over the keyhole with grim shrewdness.

"She mought be up to wummin's tricks, heigh? But what you a-goin' to do wid her ears? Folks say Saskia kin hear a whisper a mile," and Joris smiled heavily.

The farmer shook his head despairingly at this sally, but as if it were a compliment, and proceeded to light his pipe. Joris lighted his from his neighbor's, and presently the stagnant, clammy air of the apartment became still denser and more suffocating.

For several minutes profound silence reigned; then Mr. Storm, taking his pipe from his mouth and holding it with heavy dignity to one side, puffed a cloud through his nostrils and lips, as if he might smoulder indefinitely. Joris followed his example, but with an access of attention.

"Woll, Nicholas, Mr. Vroom an' me's ben arrangin' matters to our satisfaction an' with the hope an' expectation thet you'll find yourself agreeable. You'll be twenty-one come Chrismus."

"A man!" replied Nicholas, sententiously, and with apparently needless defiance.

"Aye, a man, what must fend for hisself, es fur es claims on a faather go. I've brought you up, an' now what you a-goin' to do fer me?"

"What you gittin' at now, faather?"

Mr. Vroom laughed good-naturedly. "Dat's sharp enough. Dat means business."

The farmer cleared his throat with stentorian violence. "As I wus a-sayin', you're of age. Neeltje Vroom's of age, too. A redder cheek an' a blacker eye ain't nowhar to be found. What's more an' better, Neeltje comes in fer a fine farm, ef she marries to suit her faather."

Joris nodded comfortably and emphatically.

"To make it short, my b'y, Mr. Vroom here an' me hev agreed, thet, es our places jine, — 'cept fer a strip of the widder Dutton's farm, an' which I now see a way o' gittin', — thet the nex' best thing is to jine you an' Neeltje. What d'you say 'bout it?"

"What does Neeltje say?"

"Neeltje haf not'in' to say — I say!" replied Joris, severely. "Neeltje must marry de man I picks out fer her. An obedient darter meks a happy wife. Neeltje soll haf dree hunderd and dirty-dree acre of land!"

He leaned back, swelling with pride and pomp as he mentioned her dowry.

"An' you, Nicholas, I have agreed to give four hunderd acres of land, drained an' cleared, an' fifty acre of woodland — the day you marry Neeltje Vroom."

"An' ef I don't?"

"Ef you don't! What d'you mean ef you don't!"

The young man rose. "I mean just this. When I marry, it will not be one farm or two farms. It'll be because I love the wumman."

"Woll, what de matter wid my Neeltje?" asked Joris, in surprise and indignation.

"I ain't got no fault to find with Neeltje; Neeltje an' me's good 'nough friends. There's more'n one feller, too, thet'd take her, land or no land — but Neeltje ain't fer me."

"D'you mean she don't want you? Fer she do! Neeltje's heart's ben sot on you sence Mr. Catherwood's time," replied her father, encouragingly.

"I'm sorry fer that," said Nicholas, a look of sympathy sweeping over his features, but as quickly giving place to one of firmness and shrinking. "I'm sorry, fer I can't marry Neeltje — an' it's sayin' nothin' agin her or you, Mr. Vroom. Neeltje is called the beauty of these parts,

an' far an' wide, Mr. Vroom, the talk is of your character fer straightforrardness an' goodness. I couldn't wish fer a better father-in-law. 'Tain't thet!"

"Aire you a-talkin', Nicholas, jes' to hear yourself?" inquired his father, warningly.

"I'm usin' more words'n necessary, I s'pose, but I mean what I say."

"Woll, neighbor," said Joris, rising, "it 'pears we wus mistaken, an' I'll say good night. Dere's oder men in de world, an' oder farms. But fer all dat, I'm sorry, fer our places jine, es you've said. An', Nick," holding out his hand to the young man, "I'm sorry fer oder reasons. You're a likely Dutchman. You've ben a prime worker sence you war knee-high, an' I fancy you. I don' know, Mr. Storm, what you'd a done widout him. Neeltje'll be disapp'inted, but she'll haf to git over it. Good night." And bowing with awkward, ponderous gravity, Joris put his pipe in his mouth and walked out.

Nicholas lingered irresolutely a moment, and then turned to follow; but Mr. Storm, lifting his heavy body with some difficulty, commanded him to stay. The old farmer's eyes were bloodshot, his thick under-lip worked in and out. He tried to steady a trembling hand on the table.

"You kin never mek it up with Joris Vroom, ef you try till the jedgment day. He acted ca-am, but his feelin's wus hurt sore. He treated you mighty fair, — it's his way, — but he'll be sot agin you in his heart from this day forth. Ef you git Neeltje now, you'll hev to go all the way, an' a-beggin' hard et thet. I'll give you till November to change your mind, but it'll tek a winter o' courtin' to undo this night's cussed foolishness."

"You'll give me till November, till the winter sets in, an' the work's all done?" he asked sarcastically. "An' ef I don't change my mind, what then?"

"What then? You're no son o' mine, an' Saskia'll hev all."

Nicholas stood looking steadfastly at his father for a full minute. His expression was inscrutable. Then, without a word, he turned away, unlocked the door between the rooms, and was striding across the blackness when he stumbled into Saskia.

"What a turrible fool you aire, Nicholas. Faather'll hev a fit ef you go on a-cuttin' up like this."

"What d'you listen fer?" he asked roughly.

"To hear somethin' good of myself, so it 'pears. But, though you don't believe me, I keer more fer you than havin' the hull farm."

"I didn't think so well of you, Saskia, and I'm obliged to you. But you ken have it, an' welcome, ef havin' it means bein' hopped with a wumman I don't want."

"Don't be in sech a hurry, Nick. Go an' see Neeltje more. Try an' coax a hankerin' after her."

"Oh," said the young man, in strong disgust, "she ain't my kind, an' never would be. She's ben shadderin' me these six years. She's too easy got, ef there was nothin' else."

"It's Susanna!" exclaimed Saskia, raspingly. "An' you know es well es I do thet faather'd be set agin her like a flint."

"It ain't nobody — at least, jest now."

"What'll you do when November comes?"

"I don't know. Lemme go, Saskia." And, pushing past her, he strode out of doors.

Meanwhile, the Dutton living-room was the scene of more animation than usual, for Mrs. Vroom and Neeltje had walked down the mountain road to make a call.

Grief and loneliness had served the widow for allies, and, as a consequence, a feeling of mutual confidence and kindness had taken root between her and some of her neighbors. As for Susanna, while the difference between the other girls and herself was pronounced, it was not of a kind, in their estimation, as they grew to womanhood, to foster dislike or envy. Her clothes were poorer than theirs; her speech and manner, while possessing a nameless attraction for them, were not rollicking enough to make her the belle of a husking-party or a straw-ride. Moreover, for one reason and another, she was seldom seen at such gatherings, although, in a community where eating, drinking, hoarding, and begetting were the sole factors of existence, and fifteen was no uncommon age for marriage, she was a woman grown, if not in Mrs. Dutton's thought, at least in that of the old lady's neighbors. Her supremacy over Neeltje continued, although nothing in her attitude indicated consciousness of the fact. Indeed, the power to influence and attract was something so entirely outside of her volition or effort,

that she was not yet aware of her endowment. As a consequence, she possessed the happy assurance growing out of a kindly atmosphere; and in her lonely life, the result was salutary. She gradually developed, therefore, a double relation—sympathy with her grandmother's point of view and habit of life, and a genuine relish for the homely customs and frank speech of her environment.

It was only natural, therefore, that while the women fenced over themes in order to meet on common ground, the girls were in haste to unburden themselves of endless talk about nothing, and, until they were free to withdraw, sat smiling at each other with innocent, patient wistfulness.

Neeltje was a great beauty of the heavy, amorous sort, but Susanna was responsive and with the faculty of making her own brightness seem reflected from the person she was with. Usually, therefore, Neeltje went home from a visit more in love with herself than ever, and with a good-natured indulgence for her friend's childishness; for thus far she had failed to spur the younger girl into emulation or jealousy with tales of lovers. She had never mentioned Nicholas to Susanna, who was not, however, ignorant of her fondness.

When Mrs. Vroom had happily broached the theme of the domine's call and both women were absorbed in condolence over the loss of a common friend, the young people went up-stairs.

"How fine your best room always looks, Susanna, with sech a looking-glass an' the picture of Mr. Brereton. Fer my own part, though, I'd like it better if it had a bed in it. A room don't look full enough to me without a bed."

"There isn't a bed in the domine's parlor," said Susanna, tentatively.

"The Baltuses is grand folks," retorted Neeltje, incautiously, chiefly intent upon suppressing any assumption on Susanna's part; but, realizing that she had after all conceded the superiority she was always secretly compelled to feel, she hastened to add, "But I heerd when Mrs. Baltus was sick they put a bed up in the best room fer her."

"It must have been to save steps," replied Susanna, practically, and opening the door of her own chamber with innocent pride and elation.

Neeltje glanced around with a summarizing expression.

A wistful look stole over her face. "I wish I had a washstand in my room. Maa says they spile carpets more'n enythin' else, though."

"But they are a necessity!" exclaimed Susanna, in a tone which led Neeltje to regard her sharply. She was always more or less dominated, though, when Susanna spoke in this way.

"I think so, too," she admitted. "You've certainly fixed things nice. How bright your rag carpet is! Is it a new one? When did you make it?"

"It is only turned, and it has been scrubbed."

Neeltje's eyes took on a covert fear. "Ain't you never 'fraid?"

Susanna shook her head emphatically.

"Ain't you 'fraid he'll walk?"

"I'd like it if he did. Poor old grandpa!" And her face grew tender as she thought of the recent discovery.

"It'd give me a fit to see a spook."

"O Neeltje!" and Susanna put her arms around the buxom girl. "Don't be so superstitious."

"Plenty a folks has seen them. Maa was once a-settin' up with a sick woman an' she got almost scared to death. The woman kep' a-throwin' up her hands an' askin' fer sand-witches. Did you ever hear of them kind of ghosts, Susanna?"

"Sandwiches! They are something good to eat. We have them sometimes," and then, politely ashamed of her superior knowledge, she added, "You see, we have to use up every scrap of cold meat, and when it is mixed with mustard and pepper and put between thin slices of bread, it makes sandwiches. Grandma brought the receipt from Connecticut."

Neeltje looked baffled. "Did you ever put your ear down on a grave, Susanna? I've ben too scared to ever try — but they say you ken hear the dead a tap, tap, tap-pin' on their coffins to git out."

"I don't believe a word of it. I've put my head down many and many a time on Janey's grave. Oh, if she only would give a little knock and say 'S'anna!' I'm sure I would hear her," and a sudden longing filled the young girl's eyes with tears.

"You're so queer!" now exclaimed Neeltje, walking over to the secretary and inspecting the polished wood

with intelligent discrimination. "I never see this before. It's fine."

"It was grandpa's," said Susanna, proudly.

"Open the doors an' let me see inside."

She did so.

"My, what a lot of books! Do you s'pose he read them all?"

"Of course."

Neeltje held the candle up. "What do the names say? I never was more'n a fair reader."

"This one is 'Ecclesiastical Polity,' and here's Milton's 'Paradise Lost,' and here are 'The Christian Fathers' and 'The Early Dramatists' and Sharon Turner's 'History of England'—and 'The Alhambra'—Mr. Irving wrote that. It's beautiful!"

"That'll do," said Neeltje, with a look in which the query as to whether Susanna were a genius or a fool was blended. "They're awful queer names, ain't they?" She sank into a chair, a sudden warmth of splendid color suffusing her face and her black eyes taking on a sensuous softness and longing. "Shet the door an' set down. I've got somethin' to tell you. Guess where paa's gone."

This she did many times without success.

"He's gone to Mr. Storm's. He's goin' to stop fer maa an' me on his way home." She put her plump palms to her face, pressing vehemently. "It chokes me jes' to think of what they're a-talkin' about this very minute. How d'you like Nick's looks, Susanna?" and Neeltje regarded her with shamefaced wistfulness.

"I think well enough of them," she said unconcernedly, but with a faint glow creeping into her eyes.

Neeltje, so stupid in most respects, detected it immediately. Jealousy darkened her expression.

"You needn't set your cap fer him. Paa an' Mr. Storm put their heads together when I wus a baby, but I didn't know it till to-day."

"You're welcome to Nicholas," said Susanna, with a touch of disdain. "But I wish you would stop beating around the bush, Neeltje. What did they arrange?"

"They arranged fer Nicholas an' me to marry. It's bein' settled to-night."

A wave of incredulity swept over Susanna's countenance. She recalled with a vivid, frightened perception

that just as Neeltje looked now when she spoke of Nicholas, so he had regarded her under the oak tree in the barnyard. And he was to marry Neeltje! A hot rush of gladness, as of deliverance from something horrible, gave her an access of energy, and she replied effusively, "I'm so glad, Neeltje. But why have you never told me of Nicholas keeping company with you?—and so many others coming around. When have you done your courting?"

"There hain't ben over much of it. He's so silent like an' busy. His faather's hard on him. Every one says so—an' he's contrairy—thet's what maa thinks. He won't run after a girl thet every one else wants. I've hed to do a lot of encouragin'. Saskia's helped me of course. I've took tea there every week the last six months—stayed till after dark, you know, an' then Nicholas'd hev to hitch up the buggy an' bring me home."

"Oh!" Susanna gave a little gasping choke.

"I've offered to take the reins, so's he could put his arm round me, ef he wanted to. I've done 'bout everything, but he's thet cold an' unconcerned, he drives me frantic. It can't be he wouldn't marry me, ef he knew I wus willin'—thet's what maa says. It's time I wus settled, an' it's time he wus—so paa an' Mr. Storm agreed they'd tackle him sharp to-night."

"It is all such news, Neeltje," said Susanna, wonderingly. "And what—what if he wouldn't marry you?"

"Thet's a crazy idea"—but she looked troubled.

"I've ben a-broodin' lately so—I can't help it, an' it troubles maa. I ain't used to sech treatment es Nick's givin' me—an' the quieter he keeps, the more I love him. It's jest makin' me sick, Susanna."

"But you wouldn't be sick any longer—if he had other notions, would you?" she asked, with encouraging pride.

"I don't know. I don't know 'bout thet," and her eyes contracted and her lips tightened. "I'm desp'rate fond of him. Wait till it comes to you. It teks a tighter grip than enythin' in heaven or earth. But then he can't say no. He can't go contrairy to expectations. He can't go agin his faather. Nicholas is close-fisted, too. He wouldn't be a Dutchman, ef he warn't. I'm to have three hundred and thirty-three acres for my portion."

Nick wouldn't be no sech fool es to set me aside." She drew herself erect.

Susanna sat regarding her with sorrowful scrutiny. Some instinct told her that Neeltje was altogether wrong in these calculations, and yet, as she listened, she was half convinced. There was something so splendid, so captivating at this minute in the expansion and sparkle of those beautiful black eyes, in the roundness and graciousness of every curve of hand and face and form, something withal sweet and tender in the girl's expression, as she talked on and on, unburdening herself of the few simple arguments and perceptions that she had been months in accumulating. Susanna felt she should think less of Nicholas if he slighted his opportunity. But of the depths of feeling raging in Neeltje and growing year by year in Nicholas till he had but one ambition, of these she knew absolutely nothing. She was still safely hedged about by generalities of sentiment and fancy, and, so far as her years had asserted themselves, it was in repulsions rather than attractions.

"I wish your father would hurry and come, don't you?"

Neeltje nodded.

"Let's go sit on the steps and wait for him."

The older girl sprang with glad uneasiness to her feet. "Yes, we ken hear the wheels long before we see him. It'll seem like as if Nick himself wus a-comin' on an' on. He's never squeezed my hand nor kissed me once, Susanna!" she exclaimed, with a deep longing in her voice. "Maa says the best love is love after you're man an' wife. An' I've kep' one comfort. I don't believe he's kissed no other girl. There ain't a bit of nonsense in him or I'd a found it out. Trust me fer thet."

They sat down on the steps leading from the dooryard to the road. The moon was just rising and there was a pale dim glow on the white highway. The shadows were vague and huddled. A hubbub of noise filled the air — frogs and tree-toads, the katydids and the creek, uniting in an effort to thrill the whole vast space.

From their elevation they could see the lights twinkling in the Storm homestead; after a while they saw them go out in one end of the house. In a short time the sound of wheels became audible.

Neeltje took Susanna's hand with feverish vigor, and presently hearing her father's voice in many needless exhortations to his horse, they hurried into the house.

Susanna went to the door as Joris drew up, but Neeltje retreated behind her mother, her face in a glory of color and confusion.

Mr. Vroom would not sit down, and his wife, anxious and alarmed from his expression, made her leave-taking much briefer than usual. Neeltje turned very pale. The farmer bade Mrs. Dutton good night with the heavy ceremony of a man who is afraid of forgetting himself, and finally the trio went out into the welcome darkness, hurrying silently into the spring-cart and driving quickly away.

"Something's happened," said Mrs. Dutton, briefly. "Mrs. Vroom seemed so placid, too, during her visit. I never saw Neeltje before when I could say to myself she's handsome. She was a sight to look at to-night. I wonder what it is!"

CHAPTER IV

SUSANNA passed the second wakeful night of her life after Neeltje's visit. It was almost with a feeling of returning childhood that she saw the sunshine filtering through her window the next morning. She sprang out of bed, full of resolve to hail the first opportunity to tell Nicholas of Neeltje's charms and virtues. But, meanwhile, the day was to be spent with the Van Voorhies, for, among other friendships which time and sorrow had strengthened, was a warm one with Caty Ann; and, as the widow and her granddaughter were to walk the two miles which lay between the farms, there was much to be done before the early start.

But, finally, they set out. The long line of slate-laden buckboards had passed two hours before, and the road looked solitary. Along the foot-hills, patches of stubble in which the grass had begun to spring up shone with a peacock's lustre. In the distance, a field of oats, recently mown, was being ploughed under for winter wheat, and, in contrast, the furrows of upturned earth looked rich and velvety. Long aisles of straightly planted corn hedged the roadside, the big ears sticking out in hearty fullness. Doubtless rabbits and other wild life walked down those shadowy passages with some dim, grand, and vast sensation such as the human traveller feels in the cathedrals of Milan and Cologne. The air was keen enough to extract the delicious fragrance of the tasselled corn, and Susanna tried to fancy that spring had returned and she was once more inhaling the sweet scent of the locust flowers. But, as they walked through an occasional stretch of woods, the wind in the foliage betokened the approach of autumn; for the leaves had a lusty rattle as if they had reached a buxom middle age. Along the fences, tufts of sweet fern shone with an oily, burnished greenness, and as the young

girl enjoyed their pungent aroma, she thought of the frankincense and myrrh of the wise men of the East. In the hollows and by the watercourses, the smell of the ragged robin and mint seemed to increase the coolness lingering in shady places. The fields of wild carrots resembled vast lace shawls spread out to bleach. Iron-flowers and goldenrod reared their palms and plumes in purple and yellow magnificence. Here and there a dogwood began to blush redly on the hills. It was a royal day and even Mrs. Dutton's step assumed firmness in the buoyant air.

"My feelings, just now, Susanna, are like Indian summer. Indian summer lingers but a few days, and my calmness will doubtless soon be broken in upon by something harassing. But it is good while it lasts. I have made up my mind to confide in Domine Baltus and to try to go to New York when he does. Celinda will be staying nights then, and I would not mind leaving you two or three days alone with her. It is necessary for us to know as soon as possible where we stand. I would like to have you go to school this winter. What do you think?"

"O grandma!"

They had paused beside the road. The color had leaped in a splendid flame to the young girl's cheeks. Her eyes shone with tell-tale longing and hope.

"I didn't know you cared so much," and the old lady sighed as if with gratified relief. "It is so long since I have mingled with people or heard talk of schools, though, that I should not know where to send you. We might write to Mr. Catherwood, if things should prove to be as the will says. What do you think?" she again inquired tentatively.

"I think he would be the very person," she replied enthusiastically. "It almost seems as though he had forgotten us, though, doesn't it? He has not written in a year."

"He is not the forgetting kind. There are the Van Voorhies' chimneys. Be careful to keep your own counsel. Not but that I would trust Caty Ann. But if you can't keep your own secrets, you can't expect other people to. Well, the walk has been pleasant, but I am glad we are here. My knees are beginning to tremble. How her flowers do flourish! I never saw her garden looking finer."

They were now walking along a low, thick stone wall put together with cement. It bounded a square enclosure, from which a picket gate led to a grass plot in front of the house.

Susanna leaned on the wall, regarding the flowers and vegetables with an admiring gaze.

Narrow walks, carefully weeded and edged with box, led hither and thither. The beds were brilliant with lady's-slippers, petunias, hollyhocks, and marigolds. Great tufts of pink phlox burdened the air with a kind of serene fragrance. Sweet William and heavenly blue made patches of vivid color. Onions sprawled in lazy ripeness within clearly defined limits. Beets stood in low, dense rows of dark green and maroon. Limas and corn soared high like sentinels keeping watch over an epitome of beauty and utility.

There was but one blemish on the peaceful scene, and to this Susanna had all her life been accustomed. On the wall opposite to her leaned an idiot, smiling when she smiled and viewing the flowers and vegetables with a grinning stare in which a sense of companionship was the only gleam of intelligence.

At this juncture, the upper half of the broad, green door opened, and the calm pink and white countenance of Caty Ann appeared.

"I thought you'd never git here. I've ben lookin' fer you an hour an' more. The churnin's done long ago, an' the dinner's ready to set over the fire. I've had a ham b'ilin' since breakfus'. I spect you smell it, don't you?"

"It smells very appetizing. I am always glad to get a taste of your hams," replied Mrs. Dutton.

"I don't know as they deserve the praise they git. My man's wery partic'lar, he is, to give the pigs plenty o' acorns and milk, — an' I s'pose it meks a difference. — Woll, how do you do, Susanna! When you goin' to stop a-growin'? You're tall 'nough, now." Caty Ann reached up to kiss the smiling girl. "My! an' you're es thin es a shad!" putting her arm around Susanna's waist. "You don't eat 'nough, I don't believe. I've got all the things you like fer dinner, an' I'll be disapp'inted ef you don't eat hearty."

"Now, Ikey!" — and her voice assumed a tone of motherly cajolery — "you jes' go off to the barn by paa."

We don't want you 'round now. Go!" she exclaimed, with kind firmness, as the idiot lingered.

Ike obeyed, bobbing his head and chattering giggling gibberish as he ambled towards the barn.

"He doesn't get better?" asked Mrs. Dutton, gently.

"He'll never be no better. We've given thet up. I never hed no hopes myself, seein' he wus born so. We wouldn't a minded so much," and she sighed patiently, "ef he hedn't ben the only one. But it do seem hard, when the Vrooms hes Neeltje and Peter besides thair soft-headed one. Ike's no trouble, but he's no good to hisself—but, dear me! when the Stormses lost their deaf-an'-dumb girl, what couldn't hold her head up,—” seeing Susanna's wondering eyes, she added, parenthetically, “her bones were thet mushy, you know,—I jes' fell down by my bed an' thanked de Lord wid all my heart thet he'd spared Ikey. I kind a t'ink he loves me a little. It's a gret comfort to t'ink so et eny rate.” She disappeared to bring in some refreshments, returning presently with a pleasant bustle of words and a tray of cake and elderberry wine.

“My man says it's the best I've made. Ain't it a rich color? It hes a good sparkle, too,—land sakes alive! I've never asked you to tek your things off. Woll, I never!” and she dexterously removed Mrs. Dutton's bonnet, while Susanna, walking over to the big, puffy bed in one corner, deposited thereon her own hat.

The visitors having been installed in rocking-chairs, and the women possessing themselves of stocking-knitting, the conversation, like the great wheel of a mill, began its gossiping revolutions, sucking up subject after subject and letting it fall, like spray, into temporary oblivion.

The talk, after a while, drifted into channels failing to interest Susanna, and she went out of doors. Ike was leaning against the house, chattering to himself. He did not heed her this time. A palsied arm hung dwarfed and shrivelled in his bagging sleeve. His head, covered with a thick, carrotty growth, was bare, and the low forehead, the beetling brows and vacant eyes, filled her with disgust. She scrutinized him in detail as she had never done before. She counted up out of a dormant memory and observation imbeciles in other homes. How had it happened, when they were so numerous, that there was

none in hers? The very thought of such a horror, sitting day after day beside their hearth, terrified her. She turned her back on Ike with that healthy revolt common in the young against deformity. As yet, her compassion was large only towards helplessness in natural forms.

All the beasts she had ever seen,—the fowls, her various pets,—not one among them, however poor its condition, represented such misery, such a variation from its type. What was the reason of it all? She grew full of questions. She sauntered over the long, thick grass, dreamily perceptive, but deeply reflective. What a handy device, was her wordless remark, as she passed a stake driven into the earth on which a big cart-wheel had been impaled and between whose spokes rested kettles and pans and wooden bowls, sunning in the sweet air. But, while she noticed each one of the various utensils, she was thinking of Nicholas and Neeltje and wondering whether if, after all, they should marry, they, too, would have in their home some helpless mass of affliction. She turned into the garden, and exploring the flowers became vagrant and unconcerned about the issues of existence.

Indoors, meanwhile, Caty Ann was seizing the opportunity to learn whether Mrs. Dutton had any solution to offer of the appearance in so many families of children maimed or idiotic. Many a time before she had almost reached the point of asking the question, but the delicate nature of the subject and a nexus of perceptions which she did not wish to admit as true had kept her silent.

But now, a sense of safe intimacy stealing through her being and a fresh realization of the temperateness of her neighbor's views in general making her feel she had nothing to fear, she asked with a disarming humility that was touching — "Did you ever hev a child like Ikey?"

The old lady's knitting dropped in her lap, her pride being shocked over-suddenly.

The gravity of her aspect gave Caty Ann a distinctly new perception of Ikey.

"I never had."

"Did — Maggie —"

"Maggie had no other children than Janey and Susanna."

Caty Ann sat bent forward in a heap of chubby ear-

nestness, while her knitting having fallen on the floor, the cat was playing all sorts of pranks with the ball of yarn under the bed.

"It's ben on my mind time and agin to ask ef you hed eny idee why Ikey's es he is, an' why de Stormses an' de Bols an' oders have 'em too. Dere's Joris Vroomses Moses — he's de wust of all. Aire they sech a common sight in Connecticut? It's always seemed to me sech a waste of life, an' den t'ink of de poor creeturs demselves!" She shook her head back and forth dismally. "Hev you ever heerd doctors or eny one else give a 'pinion on de subject?"

The older woman looked searchingly at the younger. "I can tell you what the matter is, if you are really in earnest. I think it is very plain to be seen where the trouble lies. The few families of this region have intermarried for two hundred years. That makes you all blood relations — third cousins at the farthest remove — and yet, you keep on marrying one another just the same. The worst of it is, you permit and even encourage some of these poor imbeciles only a little brighter than the others to set up families of their own. Think what that means!"

"What'd we do 'bout de farms," asked Caty Ann, ingenuously, "ef we brought in strangers? Land is always safe pruperty. An' ef our young men went away to git thair wives, dey'd stay away, like es not."

"Which would you rather have, Mrs. Van Voorhies," asked Mrs. Dutton, with sudden sternness, "half your farm, with Ike a fine, strong, helpful man of twenty-five, or things as they are? You and your husband are first cousins, are you not?"

"Woll," she replied slowly, her maternal pride touched, "Ikey ain't no disgrace, an' I don' know es he follered 'cause Janse an' me wus fust cousins. So's our parents, fer thet matter. Janse's smart 'nough, an' I gen'ally keep my head. We'll hev to even up t'ings a little by mekin' a match twixt Susanna an' one o' our rich farmers." She looked as if she had a flattering piece of gossip to communicate. "Dey say thet Nicholas Storm hes set his heart on her."

"It isn't true!" and Mrs. Dutton drew herself erect. "It couldn't be true that he would think of such a thing."

"I suspicion it's true myself," said Caty Ann, assuringly.

"She is only a little girl."

"Why, I wus married an' hed a baby when I wus Susanna's age."

A deep flush of irritation and amazement gradually overspread the old lady's countenance. "Nicholas Storm will have to look elsewhere," she said briefly.

"I s'pose he will, 'count o' his faather," replied Caty Ann, absorbed with her own idea. "But I don't b'lieve Mrs. Storm'd be agin it. She's always hed a raal han-kerin' after Susanna."

"I should be against it," replied Mrs. Dutton, with undisguised severity.

Caty Ann regarded her in astonishment. It was her turn, now, to feel a kindly pity.

"You don't mean to say you'd de-spise a match 'tween Nicholas an' your grandarter? You know me well 'nough to realize thet nothin'd please me better'n to see her do well, an' who'll be a greater ketch'n Nick Storm? Susanna's got nothin' to speak of, an' es likely as she is, most men is a-goin' to remember it."

"I have other plans for her."

"Hev you got some one picked out?" she inquired eagerly, a new respect creeping into her tone. Mrs. Dutton, as dictator on such a theme, implied, at least, reserves of opportunity.

"No, and I do not expect to have till she is older."

Caty Ann shook her head lugubriously. "The child ain't got no chance. She ain't got no sort of a chance. She can't afford to be too partic'lar. She must tek what offers."

Age and weariness overcoming Mrs. Dutton, she replied tartly, "She will be particular enough when the time comes, Mrs. Van Voorhies. She wouldn't be my kin if she were not particular about a sound mind and a sound body, not for one generation but for two or three. I'll never hinder her from marrying a man without a cent, if his antecedents are right."

"His aunty's seedin's?" said Caty Ann, questioningly.

She smiled, her humor over their cross-purposes and widely variant views leading her to see the folly of the discussion.

"Yes, her antecedents. They are highly prized in Connecticut," she added reminiscently.

"Do you s'pose dey'd grow in dis soil? Janse is always on de lookout fer somethin' new."

"Just look at that cat!"

Mrs. Van Voorhies sprang to her feet, and, in discovering that her morning's knitting had been quite unravelled, the conversation easily meandered to safer themes.

Late in the afternoon, when it was time for the visitors to go, Caty Ann led the way to the garden. Ike bobbed from behind a cherry tree and suddenly confronted them. The mother patted her boy on the back with a soothing laugh and he drifted off by himself again, while Mrs. Dutton wondered how any woman as sensible as she was could display so little sensitiveness concerning her child. The flowers in the basket piled higher and higher and still the clipping proceeded.

"We can't carry them, Mrs. Van Voorhies," said Susanna, "if you cut any more."

"Woll, I s'pose it's time to stop. But dey seem to say, 'me too, me too,' fer I always t'inks flowers hes dair likin's 'bout people. Dey aire all a-hankerin' to go home wid you."

Mrs. Dutton's conscience smote her for her previous judgment; for, after all, who could probe the secrets of a mother's heart or a mother's manner?

"I shall never forget your kindness to me and mine as long as I live," said the old lady, fervently. "You have been with us in our sorrows. If we had joys, something would be lacking if you were not in those too."

Caty Ann regarded her with puzzled shrewdness. Her talk had a suggestiveness, this day, tickling to feminine curiosity. But Mrs. Dutton, realizing that it was herself instead of Susanna who was in danger of being loquacious, looked innocent of special intention.

The flowers having been arranged and tied in a bunch huge enough for an English bride, Caty Ann invited her guests to inspect the milk-house.

Milk-houses to Susanna had always seemed a patent evidence of prosperity and thrift and there was a certain wistfulness in her mien when she saw the crystal brook over which the small, low stone structure was built and noticed the neatness of the cobbled bed, where not a spear of weed or fungous growth was visible. The shelves

were laden with pans of cream. Pats and rolls of firm yellow butter emitted a delicious odor. A platter of curd cheeses stirred her youthful appetite.

"Janse's goin' to de river dis evenin' wid de butter, so you're jes' in time to git de pick of it, ef you don't mind de trouble of carryin' it. Our cream butter's gittin' a name an' we're t'inkin' of raisin' de price. I made this here leetle roll fer you, Susanna. It's got my fav'rite stamp — beehives an' buttercups. An' them cheeses, Mis' Dutton, I made fer you. I kin set everyt'ing in dis shaller basket wid a wide bottom, an' it won't be no trouble 'tall to carry." Caty Ann was a delectable sight in such surroundings.

Not a wrinkle yet marred her round face. She was so blonde that her skin was as delicate as a girl's in color, while her fair hair, still abundant, was held behind by a high comb and brought in two great, flaring loops low over her ears. Her stiffly starched and smoothly ironed lilac calico gown set off her short, thick-set figure to great advantage. There was an air of proprietorship, a grace of hospitality, in manner and expression, as she packed the basket, that a week earlier might have made Mrs. Dutton review her attitude towards Nicholas with the thought of not defrauding Susanna of advantages of well-being, if only physical, that lay within so limited a grasp.

When the gift was ready, the trio sauntered down the long, grassy lane to the highway, where Caty Ann paused, while the others went on.

"Come agin, come's soon es you kin," she cried, in a last good by.

Mrs. Dutton nodded, and the young girl threw a kiss.

"I always thought I would like to have a milk-house," said Susanna, as they began their walk alone. "I'd like to keep house just like Mrs. Van Voorhies."

A smile hovered about her grandmother's mouth — the remark was so innocently invidious.

They walked on for some time in silence, enjoying the subtle perfumes of nature concentrating in an exquisite essence under the distilling power of the gathering dew. They were facing the mountains, and in Susanna's expression, as she gazed in solemn admiration on their bold flanks, resolves seemed to shape themselves — high

determinations, composed of pride, ambition, and lofty imagination.

Mrs. Dutton saw the look and, recalling Caty Ann's remarks, realized with unwonted force, that already, even in the Arcadian simplicity and isolation of their surroundings, her granddaughter was passing out of the realm of acquiescent acceptance of relations and conditions. Thinking back over recent months, she saw how Susanna had not infrequently been the directing, shaping power, and a kind of scared, bewildered sense of her own age and weightier responsibilities rushed in upon her, making her timid in the presence of a life waxing into possible and unknown capacities and adaptabilities.

"Grandma," said the girl, suddenly, "why is Ike as he is? Can that sort of thing be helped, do you suppose? I never let myself look at him closely till to-day. I think I have just taken him for granted before. And the Vrooms' idiot, too? We never had one, did we?" she asked, with suppressed anxiety of tone.

"No."

"There was one in the Storm family, too, so Mrs. Van Voorhies said to-day. My!" and she sighed spasmodically. "What made them so?" She had paused on the top of an ascent. There was a sharp furrow between her brows, arching nervously in delicate brown lines over deeply questioning eyes. The sun was half-way below the mountains, and a streak of brilliant light from the great red ball struck her with a fine glow, defining the rigid contour of her cheek and thin girlish shoulders.

"Do you remember the afternoon Harry ploughed under the sod in the upper orchard and planted it with corn? It was because the apples for two or three years had been getting speckled and rusty and rotten at the core. The soil was just worn out growing grass, year after year. All that made fine apples in it was used up because of the grass. A year or two of other crops will give the soil opportunity to get ready for making apples, and then they will be finer than ever."

"Well," inquired Susanna, much puzzled, "well — what of it?"

Mrs. Dutton suddenly felt the irritation of a reticent nature unable longer to postpone an imperative obligation. She wildly tried to think of some one on whom to thrust

the responsibility. But Susanna was absolutely dependent on her, and with the literalness of a truthful character and with a rising contempt for herself that she, a woman, should shrink from imparting knowledge to a girl already on the threshold of womanhood and which it was so important should be received in all simplicity, said abruptly and firmly, "I don't know that I can make things clear, but I shall try to do so. We are queerly made, Susanna, and the longer you live the more the mystery will deepen. We are like the trees and the flowers, and we are like the animals, too, in several particulars. But, then, again, we have a spirit that has nothing in common with things made of the dust of the earth. If a gardener wants an apricot, he grafts a plum and peach and on that branch that has peach sap and plum sap in it grows the apricot. It is so right through nature, only some kinds do not graft well with others — why, we can't tell. We simply know it for a fact through experience. There is a similar process with animals. It is the same way, again, when people marry. Intelligent people have learned that some families do not marry well with others — families, for instance, that are related. And now I have reached the most important part of all, dear. While with trees and flowers and cattle and dogs, you have only got to think of the part which returns to the dust of the heart, it is another matter with human beings. The body is one part in such a case, and the mind is another, but the soul is the chief concern. Bodies inherit from bodies, minds from minds, souls from souls. Marriage is a solemn thing."

Susanna's face had gradually cleared, and the satisfied look which comes with a new piece of knowledge stole over her features, intensifying and refining them.

"Everybody around here is related, grandma, but isn't it so everywhere?"

"It is not. It is not so by any means where I came from."

"Poor Ike!" exclaimed the girl, musingly. "Grandma, suppose, just suppose, Neeltje Vroom and Nicholas Storm got married. Do you suppose they would have —"

"Yes," interrupted the old lady, "it would likely be the same old story. Their families have married and intermarried time and again, too."

She looked dismayed. Her plan to influence Nicholas, then, was worse than useless. It was wicked.

They walked on in silence, Susanna's mind travelling over all the possibilities of her theme. She glanced up, after a while. "It would be a good thing — wouldn't it? if a lot of new families moved in here."

"A good thing for the old families, but I can't say as much for the new."

"Do you mean — mean, grandma, that the soil is as bad as that?" she inquired, clutching at the figure with relief.

"As bad as that!" replied Mrs. Dutton with such Puritan grimness that Susanna was frightened.

"It would take two or three generations to wipe out the taint that has got into the families about here, and all because they have set their hearts on land, more land!"

Once more Susanna felt like an alien in the place of her birth, but not as in her childhood because of a difference she herself did not perceive, but because the thoughts of her neighbors were less and less her thoughts and their ways less and less her ways. The instinct of sex, the instinct of race, demanding for themselves, for generations, the best, swept over her in a wave of passionate emotion she did not understand; but Mrs. Dutton, perceiving her agitation, said with the practical sense of the woman who realizes that a necessary truth has taken root, "There is an east wind blowing, and for all the fine sunset, I think there are signs of a long storm. My joints are aching, too, dreadfully."

"Give me the basket," said Susanna, immediately diverted; "I can carry it with the flowers just as well as not," and seizing it she hung it on one arm and made her grandmother take the other.

"There's home," she cried joyfully. "I see the chimneys. There's my attic window — and there's Sancho! He must have posted himself ever so far down the road to watch for us. Oh, how sweet our old tumble-down things look after being away a whole day!"

CHAPTER V

A FORTNIGHT later, the autumn was ushered in by a misty rain falling for a week. The creek rose, and its hoarse murmur gave some energy to the otherwise lifeless and gloomy surroundings. There was a gnawing chill in the air.

At this juncture, however, in Susanna's experiences, no such trivial circumstance as adverse weather could daunt her spirits or sap her energy. There was the secretary—containing a whole world of opportunity and information. There were the now frequent conversations concerning near possibilities. And—there was Neeltje and her unhappy love for Nicholas.

"I shall spend the morning over the books and letters, grandma," she said, glancing out of the window at the lowering sky, and after eating a hurried breakfast during which her cheeks had glowed and her eyes sparkled with imaginative contemplation.

"I shall fix my black bombazine, so as to be ready whenever the domine decides to start."

"I wish I loved to sew," said the girl, wistfully. "I ought to know enough to help you."

"You would only bother me, if you tried. I have my own ideas about the dress. I do not care whether you ever learn to sew or not. Maggie and I sewed our eyes and fingers sore, and what came of it? You will help me more, too," she added, with encouraging fondness, "if you will glance through the papers, first. You can tell me what they are about, and I shall know what I ought to read. When people get as old as I am, dear, letters and daguerrotypes of by-gone times are too harrowing. I don't want to cry any more than I can help these days, for it gives me such headaches, and I have too much to do to let myself get sick."

"I wouldn't sew then, grandma."

"Oh, I must! The dress isn't fit to wear."

"Well, I'm off, then," and picking up a basket of cones and apple wood, she vanished up the staircase.

The fireplace in old Egerton Brereton's former chamber was wide and deep. Kneeling on the hearth, Susanna built a ramification of cones and sticks with plenty of air-holes. In a few minutes the long yellow flames roaring up the chimney awoke what color there was in the sombre room and the chill disappeared.

During the last few days new forces and impulses had seemed to expand her, as the sap does the plant before it is ready to burst into bloom. There was a proud resolve in her mien, a greater energy in her movements, an expression as if the general helpfulness of a buoyant nature were fixed upon some definite purpose.

As she stood before the secretary, she felt overcome with an embarrassment of riches. She took down Hooker with the delicate touch and expectancy of the born scholar. The soft blur of the world outside the windows, the bareness of the chamber, where the desk and fire were the only indications of past or present luxury, intensified her tall simplicity as she stood with the open volume, reading aloud the majestic, musical periods of the Elizabethan divine. There was something in the temperateness and chastity of his thought which appealed to her sympathy, while the elegance, the rotundity, and the sweet dignity of this master of excellent English awoke intellectual instincts dormant but of vast hereditary strength. Her fragmentary reasonings seemed to have found a living voice. She read on with more expression and emphasis, enjoying the infatuation of a musical ear and a quick comprehension. Coming to the end of a long paragraph, she drew a breath of satisfaction, and replaced the volume with a lingering intentness on its title as if storing a memory. She counted the books as a squirrel might its hoard, and with a comfortable sense of sufficiency.

Sitting down before the open desk, she drew forth a parcel of letters at random and began reading them. They chanced to be the story of a life passed on both sides of the sea, and, the time being the latter half of the seventeenth century, the pictures alternated between

the court of the Stuarts and the Hartford and New Haven plantations.

"It is verily true," one ran, "that the Lady Dulcis is in great demand, and it is hinted that his Majesty King Charles has cast a longing eye on her charms, ripening with the beauty of sixteen happy summers."

"Just my age," murmured Susanna, her cheeks flushing, and her consciousness deepening with the assurance that, whatever her grandmother thought, she was old enough to have lovers. Neeltje at twenty was indeed mature.

The story of Lady Dulcis cropped out in a lengthy epistle of two years' later date.

"My lady was joined in marriage this day week to Sir Thomas Arundel of Cheshire, in the church of St. Hilary at Brereton. The pageant was of great splendor, my lady being the daughter of the Lord High Sheriff of the county. The bridal party came forth from the sanctuary with much pomp and gayety, not only of apparel but demeanor, after which the happy pair mounted horses richly and sumptuously decked and rode away in state. It chanced that while they were passing through Dutton lane, the horse on which Sir Thomas was mounted took fright and he was thrown with such violence that he received a mortal injury, expiring in the arms of his disconsolate wife only six hours after the marriage."

Still another letter read:—

"The Lady Jane Dulcis Arundel's short life ended untimely on the 10th of last January. It is said she died of grief for Sir Thomas, and, as she was but nineteen years old, it must be so. She was buried in the cathedral at Chester, in a marble sarcophagus sculptured and ornate, whereon reposes her effigy, with hands clasped and a look of youthful beauty but withal deep sadness upon her noble features."

"And our little Jane Dulcis lies on the huckleberry knoll under the pine trees, and there is nothing to tell she is there but a mound covered with red needles!" With a longing impulse, she threw the letter down, its romance unheeded, and going to the window tried to pierce the mist.

Nothing could be seen but the near apple trees, looking monstrously misshapen, and the thick, rank grass

dripping with moisture. Suddenly out of the white gloom a figure loomed, and presently Neeltje appeared, her skirts dragged, a shawl over her head and shoulders, from which her full face showed colorless. Her black eyes gleamed with relief and recognition on seeing Susanna at the window.

Stepping over the low sill, she went to the fire, bending over it and shivering violently.

"What is the matter, Neeltje? Are you sick?" Susanna gently removed her shawl.

"I seem to have an attack of ager. I burned like fire all night an' I've shivered ever sence I got up."

"You shouldn't have come out."

"Oh, it don't make no differ'nce. Nothin'll ever mek no differ'nce again to me."

"Is it Nick? Tell me all about it."

"There ain't nothin' to tell." She sat down before the fire, letting Susanna remove her shoes and stockings. When this was completed, she looked up with a stolid, hopeless stare. "Nicholas won't marry me. An' faather's thet mortified, he could kill himself—but he's mad, too."

"At Nicholas?" asked Susanna, under her breath.

"No, at Mr. Storm. He says the old man has let him mek a fool of himself, and we shall never! none of us, darken the Storm house agin. Thet's what he said, an' he means it. It gives me no chance of seein' Nick, an' I can't stand it. I've ben there every week fer six months, an' it's ben more'n meat an' drink."

"I shouldn't think you would want to go near him, now."

"O Susanna, you're a baby. Jest wait till your turn comes. Jest wait!" and Neeltje nodded with impatient emphasis. "I'm whar I'd tek what I could git an' be thankful—an' yet it meks me mad, too. Seems to me, ef I hed the chance, I'd mek Nick Storm marry me, I would!"

Susanna held Neeltje's hand, stroking it soothingly, but there was a furrow of perplexity between her brows.

"I've come to ask a favor," continued Neeltje, turning with desperate energy to the younger girl. "Ef you think I ain't seen Nick's likin' fer you all along, you're mistaken. It's hurt cruel, but I never thought—I

never thought he'd let it interfere with his prospects. But it seems he has!" She relapsed into moodiness, her large, melancholy eyes fixed on the fire which had died down to a bed of palpitating coals. "I want you to promise me you'll never give Nick no encouragement—never!" and she seized Susanna's hand with tragic energy.

"I can easily promise," was the reply, in a relieved lightness of tone jarring to Neeltje's conviction of Nicholas' value. "I do promise you."

"Stick to it! Stick to it!" she repeated imperiously.

"Don't speak to me like that!" retorted Susanna, proudly. "A promise is a promise."

"Love is love—an' I've heern tell thet promises an' honor—everything—goes down before it like tinder."

"It must be awful!" exclaimed the younger girl, with naïve earnestness.

"Perhaps," said Neeltje, doubtfully, after a long silence,— "perhaps you could say a good word to him about me. It'd be es likely to set him agin me more'n ever—but, ef he found he couldn't git you—it might set him to thinkin.' I don't know—I don't know whether I want you to or not—one minute I do an' the next I don't. How does it 'pear to you?" and she fastened a plaintive gaze on her friend, as if Susanna might have some oracular power.

"I am 'fraid I couldn't bring it in so as to seem natural. I'll praise you up whenever I see him—but, O Neeltje, I forgot—you and Nicholas are relations!"

"Well, what hes thet got to do with it?" and she faced Susanna sharply. "Ain't it all the more reason why he should marry me?"

"It isn't good for relations to marry," was the dogmatic retort.

"I'd like to know why! Don't it keep the property in the family? There ain't no better reason'n thet."

"But relations have foolish children—like Ike—and like the Storm girl that died—and like—the one in your house."

"Who's ben a-talkin' sech nonsense to you? Idjits an' cripples is accordin' to nature. Show me a family where there ain't one or two thet's soft."

"There are none in ours," replied Susanna, loftily.

"I don't know nothin' 'bout your folks," answered Neeltje, majestically, "an' they don't count, anyway. I'm talkin' 'bout us what's got big farms, an' has hed 'em ever sence the country was settled."

"Whether you know or not," retorted Susanna, sententiously, "others do. I have been reading this morning about Lady Jane Dulcis Arundel, and she was one of my people. She is buried in a sarcophagus!"

"Land's sake, what's thet? All I'd ever ask fer would be a decent grave like our folks, with a solid marble slab at the head, tellin' I wus Neeltje Vroom. Why, there's a hunderd an' fifty-seven Vroomses in the churchyard at Masticks. They've ben a-collectin' there time out of memory."

Susanna was silenced, but she soon returned to the original theme with nagging emphasis.

"But, Neeltje, you wouldn't want a child like Ikey, would you?"

"I ain't got es fur es childern. What I want is Nick, fust, last, an' always. If I hed Nick, I wouldn't care ef there wus twenty idjits. I guess we could manage to tek proper care of them ef they wus ours."

"Oh, they would be such a disgrace! Don't you think they would?"

"How would they?" she inquired angrily, at length diverted into a hot argument.

"They couldn't read or write. They would never be responsible. They could never enjoy this beautiful world. They would never have friends. Nobody would love them."

"Seems to me you don't know what you aire talkin' about, Susanna. Ef they didn't know nothin', it wouldn't mek no differ'nce to them what they could do or what they couldn't. It's time enough to worry about them after they're here."

"You shouldn't let them come. You shouldn't marry your relation."

"Do you mean to say paa and maa didn't have no right to git married, or Mr. an' Mis' Van Voorhies, or the Stormses, or the Bols? Seems to me ef you talk thet way, ef you ain't an idjit yet, you're likely to turn into one. I didn't come here to talk 'bout idjits or havin' childern, or relations. I come to tell you Nick Storm

won't marry me, an' thet it's breakin' my heart. An' I've come to beg the girl he likes better'n me" — her pale cheeks flushed with sudden flame — "to do what she kin to turn his love towards me — how, I don't know. I ain't got no pride left, an' I don't believe I've got much sense left. But whether I have or haven't, I want to know ef you'll stand by me in my trouble." She began to gasp in short, dry sobs, very pitiful and frightful to Susanna.

"O Neeltje, Neeltje, I am your friend — indeed I am! Don't! It hurts me so to see you cry like that."

"Will you say a good word for me?"

"Oh, yes, yes, I'll do anything — only don't cry so. I hope I shall never be in love!"

"You will!" replied Neeltje, grimly, between her sobs. "It's bound to come!"

"What do you want me to say to Nick?" asked Susanna, anxiously.

"Tell him I'm the prettiest girl you ever see."

"But he knows it."

"Tell him, tell him agin an' agin — over an' over!"

An involuntary expression of sickening disgust suffused Susanna's features.

"Ef you say it with thet look on your face, mighty little good it'll do. Oh, you needn't say anythin'. You'd only spile things more'n ever. Give him a wide berth, far's you're concerned. It's all I kin ask. What shall I do! What shall I do! I can't stand this pain!"

She sprang to her feet.

"I can't stand my feelin's, Susanna. They're chokin' me an' freezin' me an' burnin' me an' painin' me. Ef I don't git no ease soon, I'll kill myself!"

Susanna threw up her hands in horror.

"I shall!" repeated Neeltje, desperately, a solemn defiance lighting her desperate eyes. "Ef there isn't a turn in Nick, soon, I'll do it, sure es I'm a-standin' here."

"What good would it do?" cried Susanna, imploringly, putting her arms about Neeltje and trying to soothe her.

"The good it's done lots of others 'round here in misfortune. They're able to hold their tongues an' keep quiet an' not mek fools o' themselves. Plenty o' families kin p'int to a grave whar lies some one what hanged himself or drowned himself."

"You will never be such a coward as that, Neeltje," exclaimed Susanna, with a firmness which arrested the passionate girl. "And love—love—I read it in one of grandfather's books—love is not for our own well-being so much as for the good of others. Love seeketh not its own. How could you keep on wishing for something Nick can't give you? You'll see it will be so, I am sure you will."

"I'll never see it no differ'nt'n I do now. I'm sorry I bothered you. You ain't hed the kind of light thet comes from lovin'. You couldn't preach so fine if you hed. You've given me jest one comfort this mornin' an' without knowin' it. You've convinced me Nick's nothin' to you—an' though it's a sorry comfort, it gives me a little hope. You'll keep your promise not to give him no encouragement, won't you?" Neeltje took her hands with an imploring gesture.

"Yes, I will, I will!"

"You wus always truthful, Susanna. I never see no one stick closer to the naked truth. You're tellin' me the truth, ain't you?"

"Yes, I am," and her voice broke a little.

"Well, I must be goin'. Mebbe I'll come agin."

"Do, do come again. I will leave the window unlocked, so that if I am not here you can step right in and wait for me."

"Do you love me a little, Susanna?"

She nodded, too choked to speak.

"I hev sech a kind of a mean, forsaken feelin', I don't know how to stand it. I feel es though I didn't want to see nobody. Oh, how I do keep a-talkin'!" she exclaimed, with a sudden irritation in her voice, and drawing on her shoes and stockings in silence, she jerked herself upright, and, throwing her shawl over her shoulders, stepped over the window-sill and strode away up the slope of the apple orchard.

Susanna watched her disappear with a vague, sick feeling of disaster.

She mechanically tied up the package of letters she had been reading when Neeltje had interrupted her, and drew out another. It appeared to be those of her own mother, written twenty years before, at boarding-school. The string holding them broke, while she was picking at

the knot, and they flew in every direction. She stooped to gather them together, and, in doing so, noticed the superscription of one with startled wonder, for it was addressed to her. It looked up at her like a face from the dead. It seemed like a voice from heaven. A letter from her own mother to her! She clutched at it, holding it to her bosom. Dropping in a heap on the hearth, she began to read it.

“MY DARLING: You do not realize that you saw me for the last time in your life this morning. You turned your little face and looked a good by from the carriage, and your beautiful eyes were so wistful that I knew, after all, neither journey nor visits were as much to you as your mother. When I let you go away from me to-day, my precious child, I made my supreme renunciation to love and duty. You have been encompassed with so much sadness, your short life has been so grave, that after Janey left us I determined you should never see your mother with the shadow of death upon her. It has been so hard to let you go, my little Susanna; you, my dearest, tenderest tie on earth — to get your dresses ready, to make the blue bonnet you wanted, with the pink roses framing your sweet face — to do all this with my own hands, hard and easy; for as I put in the stitches, which were stabs into my own heart, I kept saying, ‘She will remember her mother always as a living mother; she will have a sunnier, happier heart because she did not stay to see me die, and one of these days, when her own children gather about her, she will teach them the unselfishness of love.’ O my darling, to let you go has been like tearing my soul from my body! How I treasure each word, each endearment, of this last morning together! I do not know how the heaven will look where I am going, but little Janey will be there, and papa, and one of these days you will come, and even if it is after many, many years, I shall be your own true mother still. When you return, your mamma, as you knew her, will be sleeping under the pine trees, beside your little sister. But I shall nevertheless be with you too, I think; near you when you sleep, beside you when you waken, watchful, if God permits, of your ways — your guardian to shelter you from the evil which is in the world. Many righteous men and women, darling, have lived in the world before you, of whom you are the lineal descendant. Let this knowledge inspire you to a noble life. Let the integrity, the pride, the religion, the prayer, which kept them unsullied from crime, from meanness, from dishonor, be your example. There is a God — a Father who watches over us all. Listen to His teachings, submit yourself to His influence in loving watchfulness of spirit. Do good to all as you may have opportunity, but choose your friends among your equals; when you are older you will know what I mean, and interpret this injunction in its largest sense. Above all, my darling, my precious little lamb, so soon to be without me, remember you are my child — that, though this letter will not reach you till years have passed,

you are still my child, always my child, and that whenever you are victorious over evil, over the world, the flesh, and the devil, I shall know and rejoice. I have felt so concerned about your future, but my heart is now at rest. I have resigned you, a priceless gift from God, into His keeping, and He will provide for you, body, mind, and spirit. Trust Him!

"Good by, my little girl. O the pain that struck me in the heart as I stood by the roadside this morning, watching the carriage recede, which bore you from my sight! May you never know what it is to say such a good by as mine has been. How desolate that bare, white road looked when you had vanished! How alone, alone, your mother felt! I did not mean to write this letter. It is my last cry, my last love word to my darling; I cannot refrain. Do not forget me! Love me. Sooner or later this message will reach you, and I think it will be a sweet comfort to you. When you read it, if it be possible, I shall be near you. God's love never sleeps; I do not believe a mother's can. I take you in my arms, my darling, I fold you to my heart.

MOTHER."

The letter dropped from Susanna's fingers, and she looked around the chamber with solemn expectancy. Was her mother there? A delicious, soothing sensation of companionship stole over her spirit. In some mysterious way she felt encompassed with tenderness. Her mother loved her still. She said she would love her child always. The peculiar loneliness of orphanhood vanished. A very real faith in the communion of those unseen with dear ones still in human form, gave her profound satisfaction. She thought of Neeltje's love—what Neeltje called love—and of her mother's love. A purifying tide of feeling swept over her. Love was something noble, under restraint. Love did not seek its own; what she had read was true. Her mother loved, for her mother's love was sacrificial. What, then, was this energy of misery possessing Neeltje? It must be something ignoble, something to be deplored—and she found herself blushing, why, she hardly knew.

After a while, the strange, sweet sense of her mother's presence vanished; but it came and went forever after. It never interfered with what she was doing, never actually obtruded on a chain of thought, but it made a difference in her judgments. It became a vital incentive. She felt protected, and believed she was guided.

She kept at the letters with such absorption that in the course of a week she had a clear idea of the devious fortunes and checkered history of her family for several

generations. It all seemed to dignify her ambitions and resolves. Mrs. Dutton observed, with wonder, the rapid maturing of purpose; for the transformation in a girl or boy, if delayed by growth or circumstances, is often as quick and marvellous as the first days of spring, when the grass turns green, and the flowers, as if without warning or preparation, burst from the earth in a glory of color.

But, gradually, whether the injunctions and chronicles of old Egerton Brereton had taken deeper root than was at first apparent, Susanna bade fair to develop antiquarian tastes, to the exclusion of more important interests.

Her ancestors became invested with a halo of romance, isolating them from the rest of mankind as much as if they were Mahatmas of Thibet. To the young girl, these existences of long ago were projected on a different plane from hers. The great ladies and gentlemen lived before her as such. She heard the trail of their silk gowns and the clash of their swords in the dead of night. They never slept. Or they were seated at banquets for days together, never eating, but always in the act. The women, even in tears, never dimmed the lustre of their eyes; and the men, in combat, never smeared their swords or disarranged the elegance of their attire. Stern incidents were softened in her thought, till they wore an unreality as splendid as the brilliancy of Indian summer, and as untrue to the general aspect of the careers of which they were fragments, as the brief autumnal splendor is of the year's routine of weather.

The sayings and doings of her forefathers in America underwent a similar metempsychosis. They became as poetic as the courtship of Miles Standish or the story of Elizabeth in Longfellow's *Theologian's Tale*. A diet of shell-fish and corn and pork, of buckwheat cakes and rye bread and salt meat, as duly set forth in letters of the seventeenth century, dated at Boston and Hartford, were transmuted, in her imagination, into dainties that had never materialized, and with a compound essence of delectability concocted out of all the delicacies, Dutch and Puritan, which had ever greeted her palate.

Ambushes with Indians, the defeat, betrayal, and death of soldiers during the Colonial and Revolutionary wars, the humble duties of sentinels, magnified their propor-

tions till, like the heroes of the "Iliad," she came of a stock of gods and goddesses to be eulogized in her thought and emulated in her conduct. The story of the deeds of a provincial governor, the valor of a Revolutionary general, made a trail of glory around her pathway.

Mrs. Dutton beheld with dismay and disapprobation the result of the girl's communion with the past. How was she to modify such illusions without destroying a wholesome pride and emulation? Rather reluctantly, she decided to bring forth the family skeletons and hang them in array before her granddaughter's greedy imagination.

They were standing in front of the mirror in the parlor trying to adjust a refractory hitch in the bombazine. Susanna was on her knees, pinning up here and letting down there, when her eyes seemed to meet those of Egerton Brereton. "He would feel bad, wouldn't he, grandma, to see us fussing over this old dress, now that we know we needn't?"

"He saw me doing just such things the better part of your lifetime," she replied with unwonted sternness.

"Do you suppose any of our ancestors worked as hard as we do?" inquired Susanna, ingenuously, the skirt falling from her hands. She drew herself upright, still on her knees, and as Mrs. Dutton looked into the young face suffused with that gleam of romance and reverie, the endowment of her age, it was with a feeling of genuine pity that she ejaculated — "Harder!"

"Who were they?" she inquired, in sympathetic astonishment.

"Drusilla Smith and her husband. They died in the work-house."

"Not our people, grandma!" and she sprang to her feet. "I have read all the records, and there is only one Smith down, Socrates Smith, and he was a major in the War of 1812."

"Usually, dear, when family records are kept, the rogues and scapegraces and various other good-for-nothings are left out, but the memory of them always clings, and their names are handed down from mouth to mouth. Why, there was Jabez Fordham, your great-great-uncle. He was imprisoned for debt. And there was Moses Dumbell. He was a buccaneer."

"But buccaneers were honorable. One of grandfather's books calls them delightful—'modern survivals of feudalism,' that's what it says. I remember the words exactly."

"I call them thieves. If ever there was a thief, Moses Dumbell was one. He was hung from the mast."

"I don't—call—him—so bad," said Susanna, musingly.

"And there was Methuselah Hopkins, your third cousin, and, I am sorry to say, my first, who was put in jail for stealing chickens. He was a poor drunken loafer, a disgrace to his connections."

"You are making fun, grandma. I didn't think anybody of good blood, like ours, could do such things."

"There was one other I have often heard tell of, a dame in Boston. She scolded her husband and children and neighbors so continually, that she was placed in a pillory on the Common for a spectacle."

"That wasn't anything," declared Susanna, stoutly; but her cheeks were flushed and she looked distressed.

"Well, I dare say, myself, she had good reason many a time for her temper. But there is the fact. She stood in a pillory, and, as was the custom in those days, everybody jeered at her as they passed by."

"If I ever have children or grandchildren," now said the young girl, reprovingly, "I shall keep these ugly stories to myself and let them die out."

"Perhaps you will, and perhaps you won't, dear. The black sheep in a family have a fashion of making their appearance unexpectedly; and, then, suppose you should have a daughter who laid too much stress on the past? You might find the history of Socrates and Methuselah and the others useful. It is well enough to take pride in the past, but I think a person who does should always ask himself if he has done anything to make the great or the good among his ancestors as proud of him as he is of them."

"I never thought of that, grandma. I don't suppose, really, that most of mine would look at me, except mother. She would!" and then Susanna told the story of the letter, and Mrs. Dutton put the black bombazine away till another day and wept softly to herself, sitting in Egerton Brereton's haircloth armchair in the corner by the west window.

For a whole week after this conversation, the girl abjured the fascinations of the secretary, but only outwardly; for its contents were a leaven continually fermenting in her mind. Her anxiety deepened to separate herself from the renegades of the fold, to emulate worthies whose history she now knew by heart, and to make them care for her as she did for them, in case they should be cognizant of her existence. But she became an actor rather than dreamer, and the desire to speak of Lady Jane Dulcis Arundel or the provincial governor, or any of the others, vanished. And also, since there had been thieves and drunkards among her collaterals, she reflected that perhaps it was becoming in her not to sit in too stern judgment on the custom of intermarriage and its consequences. Altogether, Susanna reacted healthfully.

Meanwhile, Nicholas did not cross her path. She began to wish he would. She wanted to make him undergo some of the vicarious suffering Neeltje had experienced, the wish growing out of a nexus of motives subtly interwoven. If she hurt him, would he not know how Neeltje felt and would it not make him love Neeltje out of very sympathy? And, again, what had happened in so many other cases of intermarriage might not happen in this. Finally, there grew in her a desire, compounded of curiosity, vanity, and the love of power, to see whether, after all, what Neeltje had said about Nicholas' feeling for her was true. And all the time she knew it was true. Youth was hot within her also, but it was seeking its temperamental expression. She was discovering herself, but through a blending of mind and emotion.

She thought of her mother a great deal. She carried her mother's letter about her, reading it and handling it so continually that it began to get ragged. Then in trying to repeat it, she found she knew it by heart, also. She would whisper softly to herself in the night or when alone—"my darling"—"my child"—and make believe it was her mother's voice she heard. And then she would reply in all manner of quaint, endearing terms of her own fashioning. She made a little quilted silk case for the precious letter one rainy day, and after it was put safely in its nest, she let herself look at it only on Sundays.

It was late one Sunday afternoon in October, and she had finished reading the letter. There was something

in the dry keenness of the air, in the perpetual falling of the crimson and yellow leaves, in the nipped yet vivid greenness of the grass, that made her feel very lonesome. Her grandmother sat asleep beside the great fireplace in the living-room. She wandered out of doors and stopped under the shelter of the stone wall supporting the little dooryard, which showed bleak and unkempt in the autumn sunlight. A few straggling marigolds spiced the atmosphere. The locusts, their delicate leaves turned an even pale yellow and sadly thinned, kept sending down a silent shower upon the waiting earth, already covered with a thick golden mat. A deep, melancholy rumble came from the creek. A couple of hens stood beside the wall, ruffling their feathers and looking vacantly, as if lost to hope, from their small, half-shut eyes.

The scene was keyed in sombreness, and, as she lingered, she called up the picture of her mother standing beside that same wall, years ago. There was the same white road down which the carriage went. And her mother stood there alone! alone! and now she stood beside the wall — alone, too!

The sound of a step made her turn. Nicholas Storm was almost at her side.

He came up, regarding her curiously. "What was you thinking about, Susanna? I never see you look so before."

"My mother. I am trying to stand where she stood and to feel as she felt, the last time I saw her. There was such a look on her face, Nicholas. It makes me homesick for her and sad for her, whenever I think of it."

"What did the look seem to say, Susanna?" he inquired, in tones of sympathy.

"Oh, I don't know, but the very thought of it gives me a pain in my heart."

He gazed at her with a great wistfulness. It had been several weeks since she had talked with him alone, and she had accordingly had no opportunity to keep her promise to Neeltje. Meanwhile, she was seeing Neeltje morning, noon, and night.

There had been a great change in Neeltje, but Susanna only half perceived it, the unhappy girl had been so con-

stantly with her; but she noticed how ill and miserable Nicholas looked. Did he love Neeltje after all, and was he unhappy, too?

"I am going away, Susanna."

"Going away! Where?" She forgot everything in her astonishment.

"I don't know. Perhaps to New York. Wherever I can get work."

"What are you going away for, Nick?" Her voice was solicitous and tender.

"Father threatened to turn me out. I won't give him the chance. I am going to-morrow, mebbe. I've come to say good by."

"Oh—don't go, Nick! You and Pete—and Neeltje are the only friends I have."

"Would you care a little, Susanna?" He drew nearer, a hungry eagerness in his clear blue eyes. He seized her hand. She was hardly aware of what he did. A dread of the lonesomeness drawing nearer, of the departure of the domine and the days her grandmother would be away, a constant fretting anxiety concerning Neeltje, and, above all, a genuine warm friendliness for the great fellow beside her, made her say, with all the rich cordiality of her nature, "I would care, indeed I would, Nick."

He seized both her hands, drawing her into his arms and kissing her before she could exclaim or resist.

The next moment she broke loose from him, thrusting him from her, the kiss burning on her lips like a coal.

"That kiss'll keep me true to you, Susanna, es long es I live."

"Oh! not to me! not to me! to Neeltje. She is breaking her heart for you!"

"Thet's said too late—too late, Susanna Kildare. You haven't kep' your word. Oh, why did you let him kiss you!"

In the garden above, on the edge of the stone wall, stood Neeltje, her face distorted with anger and distress.

"You promised never to come between me an' Nicholas Storm—an' I believed you! What a fool I wus!"

"She ain't come between us, Neeltje. You wus never nothin' to me—you never kin be. It's Susanna I've loved ever sence she could talk. I love her looks, I

love her ways. There's better young men'n me, Neeltje, an' they are a-hangin' on your words an' doin's — tek one of them." His tone had a pleading note.

"I don't want no one but you! As fer you, Susanna — I hate you!" She turned and disappeared as suddenly as she had come.

Susanna and Nicholas stood abashed and silent. She leaned against the wall, shielding her face with her hand.

"Say you love me, Susanna, ef it's jest a little," he urged, in a hoarse, choking voice, breaking the awkward stillness. "Say you do! It'd keep my courage up till I could see you again."

"I can't say that, Nick. I don't believe I know what it means to love as Neeltje does. I never want to love anybody that way. I think it is frightful. I like you," — a girlish, ingenuous expression overspread her face — "but that's all. And if you must go, I wish you good luck. But it can't be your father would turn you off! What would he do that for?"

"Do you think you couldn't never care fer me, ef you tried?" he persisted, disregarding her torrent of words and unconsciously falling into the same line of reasoning Saskia had pursued in Neeltje's behalf.

"I am sure I never could!" she exclaimed passionately, shrinking closer and closer to the wall. "I shall think of you often, Nick, and be as glad as I can be to see you, — if you ever come back, — but that is all, that is all."

He stood staring at her for a moment in speechless whiteness, and then turned slowly away.

Faint with excitement, she continued leaning against the wall, and watched him walk with a firm, steady stride down the road. When he reached a point where the land dipped a little, he paused, looked around, and stood gazing back. She wanted to wave to him, to do something to show her friendliness — to say good by once more, but she could not. She was fast learning the uselessness of words at such a moment.

When he was out of sight, she hastened to the doorway to seek for Neeltje. She went under the locust copse. She wandered through the orchard, even climbing the fence and following the road a short distance towards

the Vroom homestead. But there was no trace of the wretched girl.

Half relieved, and chilled with the frostiness in the air, she went home, bewildered over the general situation and longing, yet afraid, to tell the whole story to Mrs. Dutton, but, in her confusion and uncertainty, deciding to keep it to herself.

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CHAPTER VI

THE unfavorable weather the next week was a source of general disappointment in Klacs and the surrounding country, as the farewell sermon of Domine Baltus, advertised for the following Sabbath, was anticipated with universal interest.

The furniture and other belongings of the minister had already been shipped, and as the farmers passed the empty house and beheld the windows staring at them curtainless and eery, and noticed the deserted aspect of the barns, they shook their heads as though a calamity had befallen the neighborhood. Meanwhile, the domine and Mrs. Baltus were visiting from home to home, and the exhortations and injunctions, the warnings and commands, the blessings and advice of the Rev. Dominicus, proved household themes a year after.

But whether the rain held up or whether it continued to pour, the congregation would have been a goodly one; for a man who is feared as much as he is loved has strong drawing powers.

The weather, however, seemed to appreciate the merits of the situation; for Sunday morning dawned balmy and aromatic and with the misty dreamy atmosphere of Indian summer. The zenith was as blue and limpid as an infant's eyes and, stretching down from it like the curtains of a vast tent, rayed soft, semi-transparent hazes veined with opalescent light. The oaks and maples, like candelabra lighted for a solemn festival, spread out their branches radiant with flaming leaves. The creek rushed and roared through the farms along the foot-hills, as if acclaiming the virtues and services of the domine. The mountains shone through the haze like a promise of the strength and steadfastness of the Almighty.

Along the wood-roads and the highways, on foot over

the paths through the forest, from every direction, the congregation gathered.

The Storms were in the family pew a half-hour before service began. Nicholas, who had not yet carried out his intention to run away, was in the far corner, white and set and haggard. His mother sat next, voluminous and pulpy, and Saskia and her father, side by side, their profiles looking as if cast in the same mould. There was a huge, knotty bunch in the middle of the old farmer's forehead, under which his nose flared towards the point like a scoop. There were muscular bunches of mottled purplish fat on his cheeks and another in the middle of his under lip, giving his expression a horny pugnacity terrible to children. Great fat ears, like oysters, lay heavily against his thick neck and rested on the folds of his black silk stock. His scanty hair was spread in scattered streaks of dirty gray over his square head. His big hand, like that of the wooden statue of Boulak, rested ponderously on a thick walking-stick, while his small, pale blue eyes, gleaming under brows from which sprang a tuft of long irregular hairs like the feelers of a beetle, stared now at the chancel, now at the high pulpit with its sounding-board fashioned like a shell, and now with a downcast, sidewise look at the people gathering in a hushed, impressive bustle in the pews in front of him.

Saskia sat as rigid as a mummy and looking as tightly bandaged. Every time she stirred, the seams of the purple silk creaked, while the willow feather, somewhat out of curl, sprawled lazily over the side of her yellow straw, as if tired of its long existence. Her feet were cramped and cold; for she wore a pair of prunella gaiters with patent leather tips, the soles of which had never been allowed to touch mother earth, except between the portals of the sanctuary and her home. Although they had served her purpose ten years, appearances indicated they would last during her life; for the only sign of wear was the snapping of the elastic bands down the sides.

The Vrooms were all present but Neeltje, and, as they sat in one of the corners, Peter and Nicholas from time to time exchanged furtive and unwilling glances, each catching the other repeatedly in the act. Peter wondered at Nicholas' miserable appearance, suspecting he would relent after all, while Nicholas was filled with loathing

for Neeltje, Peter serving so well as her simulacrum. He hated Peter's expression, at once agreeable and aggressive. He distrusted the cast in those bold eyes, otherwise handsome like Neeltje's. He felt like striking at the set of Peter's even, square shoulders, as sturdy as those of a young ox. To Nicholas, the ingredients in Peter were fair enough, but there had always been something wrong in the proportions. He found himself wishing he might never hear or see a Vroom again.

Susanna had started early, having to walk the three miles and rejoicing to do so. Occasionally, a passing team, loaded to repletion already, offered to give her a "lift," but she refused each time. She did not reason about the exhilaration of air and sunshine, she did not indeed know that much of her elation of spirits and buoyancy of step, and delight in motion as if it were a thing of wings, were due to the fine day. The enjoyment was pure; it was spontaneous. The occasion seemed momentous to her, however, not only because Domine Baltus was to preach his last sermon, but because it was arranged that her grandmother should accompany Madame Baltus and him the following day. Perhaps their departure was the forerunner of the time when she, too, would go away — where, it mattered little to her; for the whole world outside the farm and its environs was a Quixotic land of romance and adventure. And all the time, like the refrain of some dear, familiar hymn, her present life, her few associations, her pets, and the old gray house which was as much a part of her as its shell is of the turtle, kept recurring to her thought, and then a lump would rise in her throat and the tears spring to her eyes.

Klacs came in sight while she was thinking hard, and took her by surprise; and, lying as it did in a continuous, straggling street along the side of a hill on top of which stood the church, an antiquarian might have likened it to one of those long dolmen approaches leading to a Druidic circle.

As she drew near, she became part of a general movement, like that of the children of Israel going up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.

The sheds at the back of the church were already crowded with every form of vehicle, from the high-topped

arryall, out of whose funereal depths whole settlements seemed to pour, to the dapper buggy in which some young buck had driven his sweetheart. There were spring-arts and springless farm-wagons. There were carriages sagging with age and bearing rusty side lamps. There were horses whose coats were never brushed from one ear to the other, and ponies already shaggy with the rough, irregular winter growth of dingy red and faded black. There was harness of every description, from rope to leather. Squads of men stood huddled together under the trees or flanking the broad, flagged walk leading to the portico. They were almost all round-shouldered—with faces red from exposure or slowly sinking out of sight under a hirsute mask making huge callops under their eyes, and with the hair framing in their ears as a dentist does a tooth with a coffer-dam. Only the keen, shrewd, slowly blinking stare, the backward thrust of a head in laughter, or the sawing of the air with a hand in gesticulation told how much alive each one was or how intent on the gathering multitude.

Just as Susanna stepped within the stile shutting off the enclosure around the church from the common, Betsy Hoover gave her shoulder a nip, and whispered: "See my new hank'chief. I've ben a-savin' it fer a gret occasion."

Betsy was a spinster of forty, chubby as a pincushion, and with cheeks on which two red fires perpetually burned.

"It seems pretty large, but de pedlar I bought it of es it's all de fashi'n in York, an' thet I wus to carry it es' so. It's awful staaft, too, but it's handsome, ain't it! I paid 'leven shillin's fer it—an' cheap et thet, de pedlar said—a reg'lar barg'in. What d'you t'ink of it, Susanna?" She stood as straight as her thick-set figure would permit, in stolid pride and satisfaction, holding cinically between her forefinger and thumb an enormous dinner napkin, the highly glazed surface of which revealed, with startling distinctness in the sunlight, an intricate design of roses and ferns.

"It is a beautiful pattern, Betsy," said Susanna, in hysterical glee, "but I don't see how you can wipe your nose with it."

"Oh, I've got another fer thet. Dis is jes' fer orna-

ment, de pedlar said. Here's my oder!" and she produced a coarse piece of homespun linen. "I guess Saskia'll open them blinkin' eyes of hern fer once, don't you?" and nodding in anticipation, she tripped on towards the church.

Susanna loitered up the walk, feeling in no haste to enter, for it was still early. She spoke to some of the men as she went by with a certain bashful shyness, not without its effect where every one was more or less timid in human intercourse. If she had looked one of those men straight in the eyes, even with the innocence of a cherub, he would have considered her bold, and in manner she was sufficiently of the neighborhood to be thought only a pleasant variation. If her grandmother were not, she was, indeed, among her own people in many familiar senses of the term.

Adam Torpyk and his wife stood at one end of the broad, stately porch, under the shadow of a pediment supported by massive wooden Corinthian pillars. There was a dull vibration of the building; for the first bell, the sounding chronometer for miles in every direction, had begun to ring. Adam beckoned Susanna as she ascended the long, low steps, the brick foundations of which made a solid basis for the flags above them.

She sauntered to the group surrounding him rather reluctantly, for he was long-winded and in the midst of one of his endless religious experiences.

"I wus jes' a-rehearsin' my conviction of sin, my gal, an' I t'ought it might be a spiritual help."

Mrs. Torpyk held out a lean hand, drawing her nearer with a steely grip, Susanna wishing that the officious woman would keep such knotty tentacles at a distance.

"I wus a-sayin'," repeated Adam, in a tone of unctuous contemplation, while stroking an enormous carroty beard spreading over his chest like the filings between the poles of an armature, "thet I've ben cock sure of the story of Atam an' Eve ever sence thet 'ere time I wus convicted o' sin. I felt thet mean an' mis'able an' forebodin' an' desper'te thet I jes' groaned out loud."

"I never see enythin' like it, never! in all my born days," interjected Mrs. Torpyk.

"I called on de Lord an' I called on Gawd, an' I be-seeched de Holy Sperit fer help, but thet 'ere conwic-

tion kep' a-growin' an' a-growin' till my mis'ry wus mount'inous."

"P'r'aps 'twas yer liver," said Billy Hoover, sympathetically, but always of a literal turn of mind. "I've heern tell of jes' sech feelin's wid a swelled liver."

"'Twarn't no liver nor no enyt'ing human. 'Twas jes' de Lord a-gittin' ready to speak. He always hes His own ways, en I've most gen'ally found 'em peculiar. Dey wus in dis case."

"It happened at an onusial time, too," added Mrs. Torpyk.

Adam nodded. "Yes, 'twas 'bout t'ree 'clock in de mornin' near's we ken make out, fer Mis' Torpyk hed ben up wid me all night, a-puttin' mustard plasters on an' givin' me hot drops an' what not. She t'ought it wus de liver or spleen or somethin' like thet, too, Billy, but 'twarn't. All to once, es clear soundin' es thet 'ere bell is above us, I heerd: 'Atam, whar art dou?' An' I felt so naked an' 'shamed-like in sperit thet I hid my head in de bed-clo'es. But it wusn't no use. No matter how t'ick a comf'table is, it don't hender de Lord from carryin' His p'int. — 'Atam, whar art dou?' I heerd agin, an' in sech a v'ice thet I jes' cried out like es when we wus b'ys et school — 'Coop, Lord!'"

"Did you git relief?" asked Billy, deeply interested.

"Not right away. De Lord wusn't a-goin' to let me off es easy es thet — after sech a long tussle. Mis' Torpyk, when she re'lized de sitiuation, she jes' stopped de med'cines an' fell on her knees, an' prayed, too, jes' es hard es she could pray. It wus 'bout five 'clock when we both, all of a suddent, felt es ca-am an' quiet es a spring day. De conviction wanished an' I felt es happy es a child, an' in ten minutes we wus es sound asleep es b'aars in winter. Never waked up till nine 'clock. You ought a seen what a fuss de critters wus makin' in de barn when I got out dere 'long ten 'clock."

Adam's audience stood in various attitudes. No one could have told from their faces whether they believed him or not. A dead silence reigned when he concluded.

"Yes, dat's de reason I know de story of Atam an' Eve is true. Come, Mis' Torpyk, we'd better be goin' in."

The group Adam left in his trail did not break up im-

mediately. Billy Hoover glanced furtively at Eben Van Tassel. Eben returned the glance, squirting a stream of tobacco juice so successfully that it escaped the steps of the sanctuary.

"Woll," said Eben, slowly, putting his hands in his pockets, and looking towards the mountains, "'tain't my idee o' Gawd. I've seen Adam Torpyk, time wid-out number, a-stuffin' hisself like a Chris'mus turkey, an' like es not, ef we could git at de truth, thar wus half a mince pie a-quar'lin' in his stomic wid a pint o' raw whiskey."

"Thet's about my idee o' de matter," assented Billy. Meanwhile, he was gazing steadily at Susanna, much as he might have done at a promising colt.

She grew restless and indignant, and entered the church. As her grandmother had no pew, she waited for Madame Baltus. The domine's pew was a front one, opposite the Vrooms', as his wife, slightly deaf, and fond of his eloquence, wanted to hear every word he said.

Susanna followed her up the long aisle, the swish of madame's trailing satin gown making noise sufficient to electrify the congregation into one of those awful silences so suggestive of dignity and rank. The august lady stood aside to let the girl enter first.

A flush overspread Nicholas' face and receded, leaving his high features in chiselled prominence. He sat straighter and drew a long breath. Peter saw his agitation, and when the man who had rejected the Vroom family, so to speak, glanced towards them in an effort at control, it was to meet from Neeltje's brother a scrutinizing stare darting out like a spark of fire from between squinting lids. In that search-light, Peter's childish interest in Susanna revived.

Madame Baltus, towering beside her like some magnificent foliage plant, what with the long, purple leaves on her gown, and the bunch of purple feathers on her hat, made the young girl's slender proportions appear still more slight. As the lady gazed down at the serious, youthful face beside her, with an expression of maternal tenderness, Susanna nestled towards her. Nicholas saw their hands meet half-way in a loving clasp, remaining joined till the domine entered.

When Domine Baltus appeared, frivolity ceased.

To the most callous-hearted, there was something awe-inspiring in his advent. He issued from a tall, narrow door at the left of the pulpit—an immense, imposing presence, his black gown puffing out from its deep yoke as he strode before the uplifted gaze of the congregation. His white hair, stiff and bristling, was combed up straight from his forehead. There was a baggy drooping of the brow over the blue eyes, humorous one second, and cold and searching the next. The full under lip, with the same muscular protuberance as under that of Farmer Storm, proved him the old man's match in pugnacity and firmness. His round, florid face, his swelling chest, his rotund voice, suited his congregation as to three qualifications,—evidence of good living, capacity to wrestle in the flesh if occasion demanded, as well as the spirit, and a sledge-hammer delivery, supposed, in those remote regions, to carry with it as much unction, if not more, than the best sermon ever written.

The service, the usual lengthy and noble one of the Dutch Church, was entered upon with unanimity and severe dignity. But, on this day, it was a minor matter. The sermon was the objective point on which every mind was centred; for it was expected that it would be, as it were, the seal of the recent call, a shining proof of the varied powers of the man who had baptized or confirmed or married nearly every person present.

The serene eyes of the Rev. Dominicus Baltus gazed with august calmness and deliberation over those full pews. Here and there a notorious "sinner" blinked, the occasion for the minister to cast a second searching glance, as if he were the premeditated cause of such involuntary betrayal. MacDuffy stared back defiantly, but fidgeted in spite of himself. Susanna, seldom present because of the distance, and susceptible to whatever was serious or formal, sat in spell-bound expectancy. She glanced at Madame Baltus, but that lady was to all intents and purposes hypnotized. Not a feather trembled on her high hat, her hands, in black kid, were folded across her lap, and her cold Dutch face, honest, haughty, and matronly, was lifted towards the pulpit, as if its occupant were either a high priest or a patroun.

It was generally observed that day that Mrs. Vroom

wiped her eyes long before the preaching commenced. It was also a subject of comment that Nicholas Storm and Peter Vroom stared at Susanna Kildare without taking their eyes off her a single instant; that Farmer Storm never appeared more "sot," nor Saskia "homblier"; and that Mrs. Storm showed evident signs of "agein'." And long after the domine had departed, the merits of his sermon were summed up in the unanimous verdict, that it was a final call to two men in particular, — Mac-Duffy and Torpyk, — but was, of course, pertinent to everybody in the way of general exhortation.

The Van Voorhies were never tired of quoting the text, declaring it "straightforrard and to the p'int," and doubtless the Rev. Dominicus knew his congregation well, when, at the end of that long and effective silence succeeding the service, he thundered: "Philippians iv. 19," — and then in deeper, slower tones, said, formally: "You will find the text for this morning in Fourth Philippians, verse nine-teen!"

There was a rustling of skirts and opening of Bibles.

When the silence was again profound, the domine read, with awful solemnity and icy enunciation, "Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things."

Every foible, every weakness, every sin twenty-five years spent in Klacs had revealed to him, was skilfully but ruthlessly handled. The feasts and drunken carousals at funerals were delineated, the dangers of entail and the demoralizing results of sordid marriages were denounced, the stupidity and ignorance leading a community to glory in what was the shame of others was pictured, and over and over, like a refrain, the domine repeated, "They who do thus, mind earthly things."

No one would have dared leave the church. Many wanted to. Farmer Storm, in sour disgust, pretended to go to sleep, but he kept winking furiously. Two round spots as big as copper pennies burned on Caty Ann's fair cheeks, for she was rendering the verdict to herself that Mrs. Dutton had Scripture on her side.

Nicholas, hearing views in harmony with his desires, waxed stronger in rebellion, while Saskia felt as if foundations intended to be everlasting were being violently shaken.

But, by and by, denunciation and exhortation ended, the domine played upon the hearts humanly warm and tender under those unpromising and neutral exteriors. Betsy Hoover forgot herself and tried to wipe her eyes with her "staaff hank'chief," and Susanna, seeing it, smothered a stifled laugh, but not before meeting Madame Baltus' reproving gaze.

Finally, the long sermon was brought to a melting termination, the short after service was finished, and the congregation broke up into small, waiting groups to bid a last good by to the man who had been their father in the Lord, their autocrat in politics, and their adviser in matters educational and social. He had never had a predecessor his equal; it was years before his successor received a call to the Evangelical Lutheran Dutch Church of Klacs.

CHAPTER VII

By some mesmeric communication peculiar to country neighborhoods, it became widely known that Mrs. Dutton was going to New York with the domine and his wife. Endless were the speculations. The last week before the journey, she received more calls, accidental or incidental to errands not connected with her, than she had in three months previous.

Her granddaughter was not allowed to be in evidence on these occasions. Celinda made innumerable excuses to be more or less present, and her faithful soul delighted in the questions parried or answered in generalities affording no enlightenment.

And finally the widow set off, the cause of this unusual exit into the world still wrapped in mystery, and, at the last moment, the importance of her business fortunately overshadowed by the final leave-taking of Domine and Madame Baltus, which continued all along the route till the trio was on board a Hudson River night-boat.

Susanna's sensations on being left alone for the first time in her life were tinged with elation and self-importance; but as the twilight blackened the steep slopes of the mountains and the thinning foliage assumed a meagre and forsaken aspect in the chilly evening air, the full sense of her isolation swept over her and she was seized with that foreboding, poignant sense of lonesomeness as unreasoning as it is intense.

Celinda prepared tea, but the young girl's appetite failed when she sat down at the table alone.

She was not left in solitude long before the latch of the upper half of the door was lifted, and MacDuffy's head was thrust inside.

"Where's your grandma?" There was an innocent inquiry also in his small, blue-gray eyes.

“Mis’ Dutton’s gone out,” replied Celinda, with an air of indifference.

“Gone out, eh! Where’s she gone?”

“Do you want to see grandma about anything?” now inquired Susanna, in a clear, cold voice.

“Yes, I do; I want to see her to-night ’bout business.”

“Very well, tell it to me,” was the reply, so loftily uttered that the Scotchman gave a start.

“Oh, you ain’t no account,” he answered airily. “Where’s Mis’ Dutton? I’ll go to her if you’ll tell me where she is.”

“Your business’ll hev to wait till she comes back, I guess,” interposed Celinda.

“She’s gone’s fur es that, eh? Gone to York?”

“I guess everybody knowed yist’day dat de domine an’ Mis’ Baltus invited her to go ’long wid dem. De domine say a change’d do her good.”

“H’m!” grunted MacDuffy, looking incredulously from one to the other. “When’ll she be back, Susanna?”

“I don’t know.”

“Don’t know!” He reached over to unfasten the lower half of the door. He had not been inside the house since the stone wall was built. “I always heerd whan the latch-string wuz out, cump’ny wuz welcome.”

“When we want company here, we invite it,” she replied, kindling and springing up to prevent the intrusion.

He shuffled his feet as if to run, a teasing smile playing over his features. Suddenly he touched the young girl under the chin. “Expectin’ Nick Storm an’ Peter Vroom to-night, ain’t ye? Which is it to be?”

She grasped the upper half of the door swinging near, and with a vigorous push shut it in his face, while Celinda, picking up the bar, thrust it in its sockets. The intruder lingered on the flagging a few minutes, walking off with a loud, derisive laugh.

“I guess, after all, Celinda, you’d better sleep in grandma’s room to-night — though I’m not a bit afraid!”

“I guess so, too. You don’t know how bad a bad man is, honey. He’s wus’n a hyena.”

The girl laughed. “I don’t know how bad a hyena is.”

“Thar’s lots of ’em down souf,” said the colored woman, consequentially, “an’ dey’s wus’n eny of de

critters 'roun' here — wus'n b'ars, wus'n porcypines, wus'n rattlesnakes an' copperheads."

"Do you suppose he's gone?" asked Susanna, apparently unimpressed.

"Law, yes, long ago. 'Twan't nothin' but cur'osity brought him here. We'd better go out to de barn and make things ready for de night before it gits later, dough."

"Let us do it right away — although I am not afraid. I am only lonesome." She went to the window and peered out. "Yes, he's gone. He is way down the road near Mr. Storm's. I wonder if he did have business."

"I've heern some talk 'bout a mor'gage on de fields under de ledges, an' dat Farmer Storm's got hold on it somehow. Has Mis' Dutton said enythin' 'bout it to you? It might be 'bout dat. MacDuffy's a reg'lar cat's-paw for Mr. Storm."

"Run up to the attic and see if he goes in there."

She came back in a few minutes. "Yes, he's makin' a bee-line 'cross de medders to de hickories. I wonder if 'twas 'bout de mor'gage."

"We won't borrow trouble," replied Susanna, with an assumption of dignity, not without its effect. She unbarred the door.

The mists were creeping up from the water and filtering in bands of uneven density through the hollows and over the fields. The frosts had not been heavy enough to shrivel the leaves, and they lay in beds of russet and yellow and red beauty under the trees; they continually sifted down in little companies or singly, as if in response to a command, or as if, like travellers, some desired to journey alone and others in parties.

The moon was full, and its light, yellow in the cool October air, blended with the last rays of the day, so that everything stood out with peculiar distinctness. The branches of the trees against the sky were like drawings in India ink on a blue background. The tops of the mountains were as sharply defined as if carved out of sapphire.

When the chores were completed, the two walked towards the house, half enjoying and half dreading the long shadows blackening in sheltered places. But in the roadway, with the splendid arch of the sky showing

between the trees, its distant curve now sprinkled with stars and luminous with the moonlight conquering the gloom of night, Susanna thrilled with a wave of religious feeling and that exquisite sense of adoration taking the lover of nature unawares; pointing upward, she said, with a tone and emphasis as if the thought and words were her own: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handywork." — I love Him!"

"It's a beautiful sight, shore," replied Celinda, her sympathetic nature giving assent to whatever her mistress might say. "But it's damp — raal fever an' ager weather. The rain's left so much water lyin' 'round loose in de medders. Ugh! de shivers is a-creepin' down my back a'ready!"

Susanna smiled, and taking the woman's arm ran vigorously with her, thrusting her into the kitchen.

"Quick, the fever is after you."

The maid laughed hilariously, better able to understand the fiend-principle than the spirit of beauty.

"Let us go up-stairs. Doesn't grandma's rocking-chair look mournful! I'll see if the cellar is all right," and lighting a candle, she opened the door into the long, narrow passage. It was a gruesome enough place at any time, dark and damp and always musty. The water was now dropping from the shining wet wall with a continual drip, and the boxes on the bottom were floating about in a rocking dance of their own, rendering footing difficult and dangerous. Celinda thrust her black face in while Susanna ventured further, holding the candle high and peering hither and thither.

"It's wetter'n usial, ain't it?" was the woman's brief comment as the young girl came out, locking the door after her. Then the door into the room MacDuffy had built was tried anew, and after twice the usual ado over securing things generally, — graphic tribute to the moral value of their sense of Mrs. Dutton's protection, — they went up-stairs.

"You may go to bed just as soon as you want to, Celinda. I shall sit up late — reading books written by good men," and she smiled archly.

"Laws' sakes, child, I ain't sleepy — but I'm tired. I guess I will turn in, dough. What's dose books

'bout?" she inquired maternally, feeling it her duty to take an interest.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Susanna, somewhat indifferently, and then spurred herself into animation, as if, in her turn, she felt she ought to enlighten Celinda. "One is by a poet, about death, sin, and judgment."

Celinda looked serious.

"It is called 'Night Thoughts.'"

"My!" ejaculated the maid.

"Yes," she continued, warming to her subject, "and there is Fox's 'Book of Martyrs.' It tells about people whose thumbs were twisted off with screws, and about others who were stretched to fit beds too long for them, and others who were burned to death."

"O my soul, you don' say so! Some day, Mis' Susanna, I wish you'd read to me out'n dat book."

"Yes, indeed, but to-night I'm going to read 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' Did you ever hear of that?"

"Course!" replied Celinda, with importance. "Ev'ry nigger knows 'bout dat book. It's nex' to de hymn-book an' de Holy Bible." She yawned. "I guess I'll make my bed up."

Susanna herself proceeded to light a fire in the parlor, dimly illuminated by one candle. When it was in a blaze, she drew the door of her grandmother's room shut, and sat down to indulge in the luxury of the situation and a reverie; for the story, still untouched, had not yet bound her with its fascination.

She had not seen Neeltje in a week, and she wondered about the unhappy girl. Her eyes fell on Egerton Brereton's portrait. What was her grandmother doing at that minute? What news would she bring back? How would the old gray house look if they did go away? She glanced about with an uncanny realization of the vacant rooms, the unwarmed hearths.

She had not drawn the curtains. The front windows were high, and the west window was so shut in by the dense hedge of locusts that it was effectually screened. Her gaze fell on the mirror between the front windows, memory fondly reverting to the picture of little Janey's face so often reflected there. But now, she saw with a shock, which sent the quick blood to her heart with choking force, the reflection of the room behind her, and

the west window like a frame enclosing in the darker vista back of it features which came and went obscurely like those in a blurred and old daguerrotype.

Hers was a naturally fearless nature, seldom daunted by realities, but sometimes shaken with fears of things not fully realized; and again, at intervals, as if her Celtic blood were striving for supremacy, she dreaded the supernatural. But, usually, she was literal, direct, and practical in speech and action. A scurrying horror, sweeping in and away in an instant from her intense visualization of the dead forms she remembered lying under that window, was followed by an instant determination to look out.

She pressed her face against the pane. Enough of the moonlight penetrated the thinning foliage for her to see distinctly a considerable distance. No one was visible, and the spaces under the locusts looked so sylvan and peaceful that her sensations vanished. She lingered long enough to become imbued with the serenity of the scene, and then, turning her chair away from the mirror and towards the fire, was about to begin her book, when it occurred to her to look out of the front windows. This time she took the precaution to go into her grandmother's room. Celinda was snoring as if her satisfaction with sleep were perfect.

The moon shone down brilliantly on the white road. The ancient locusts on the opposite side, their branches beginning at a great altitude, offered no obstruction to her view of the garden. The tufty grass of the lawn, already white with the gathering frost, was as silvery as edelweiss. The farther half of the barnyard showed, and the branches of the great oak under which Nicholas had stood watching her milk repeated themselves in fantastic shadows on the ground.

"Oh!" she exclaimed involuntarily; for there, leaning against the stone wall, his arms folded on his breast, his face startlingly distinct, stood Nicholas.

She held her breath; there was a sudden warm fluttering of her heart, excited by an odd blending of surprise, pity, and sentiment. This feeling fled as precipitately as it had mounted, to be succeeded by one of irritation. She noticed how tall the young man was, how broad and straight his usually round shoulders could be. His face

indicated no sickly nursing of sentimentality. Its expression fascinated her. The features slightly sharpened, the full lips so tightly set that they suggested the old farmer's pugnacious mouth, and a complex agony of resolve in the usually clear, calm eyes, let the girl into the secrets of a nature gradually but thoroughly awakening to all that this crisis of youth involved. And she was in it; she was part of it; she was the cause of it.

She clasped her hands tightly behind her, every muscle of her body in sympathy with the tension.

And this was what being in love meant to Nicholas. He was unhappy. Neeltje was unhappy. She turned away, a kind of devout, selfish thankfulness seizing her that she had not been thus overtaken — a sense of relief that it was only Nicholas, after all, who had been looking in the window.

She went back to the parlor and drew down the curtains, not permitting herself to glance out as she did so. Then, with a certain Puritan coldness of aspect and intention, she opened her book.

She had read just far enough to become thoroughly absorbed, when there was a knock at the door.

"He has come back," thought Susanna, half irritated, but also pleased that his desire to be near her had overcome him.

But when she opened the door with an expression instinctively reserved and questioning, there stood Peter Vroom. Relieved and surprised, she broke into smiles and welcome.

Peter walked in with considerable stir and consequence. He was a great big fellow, with a splendid clear red and white complexion, faultless teeth, and with the same abundant black hair and large black eyes distinguishing Neeltje. Only Neeltje's eyes could be soft and opaque on occasions, while Peter's had cold brown depths and never lost a hard sparkle and a quick, darting observation.

It dawned upon her in a few minutes that he had come for the sole purpose of making her a call. Such an occurrence had not happened since they were children. She wished one second that her grandmother were home, and felt glad the next that she was mistress of a situation having its embarrassments. Of course this had to come

some time; it was of constant occurrence with the other girls of the neighborhood. But what was expected of her — what should she talk about? Oh, what could she talk about — if he stayed, and stayed, and stayed?

He crossed one leg over the other and contemplated the sole of his boot. The young girl looked desperately at it too, but it was not suggestive, except of size. Woman-like, she felt the burden of constant speech resting upon her.

"Hev you heard thet Nick Storm talks o' goin' to York?" asked the young man, his eyes glittering with hostility, as he scrutinized her.

"It seems as if everybody were going, doesn't it?" she said, so lightly that Peter's intention was diverted. "Domine and Mrs. Baltus, and now Nicholas. When is he going?"

"Oh, I don't know. His father laughs when folks twit him with it, an' says it's all talk. But I don't b'lieve a word of that! MacDuffy says he's ben jilted. Wonder ef it's true, don't you?"

She colored, her sympathies rising to the defence of her friend. "The domine wasn't jilted, nor grandma. You don't suppose that everybody who goes to New York goes because he's crossed in love."

Peter frowned; but his wit, as in childhood, was heavy. "It's certain Nick an' his father's fell out," he declared ponderously.

"He may come back a great man one of these days. He was the smartest boy in school, you remember, and there isn't anything he can't turn his hand to. Why don't you go, Peter?" Her voice was gentle, but her tone was irritating.

"Hum's good enough fer me. I've got a big farm, all my own, an' a good house on it, an' I am a-goin' to settle down in that house like the other Vroomses in theirn, an' be contented, same es they've ben, with makin' a good livin'."

"But you can't live there alone," she exclaimed ingenuously. "Perhaps, though, you could get Neeltje to keep house for you."

"Neeltje'll have a house of her own before long," he replied sharply. His manner was nettled. He caught Susanna's surprised look.

"Oh, you've ben a-hearin' this goll-darned talk 'bout Nick Storm, too, have you?"

She drew herself up, offended with his liberty of speech.

"I didn't mean to speak so rough before you, but it's ben enough to make Moses swear. Don't you believe half you hear, no, nor a quarter," he continued anxiously. "You'll see Neeltje in a home of her own a year from now, or my name is not Peter Vroom. You an' her's always ben pretty good friends, ain't you, Susanna? I hope it will continue."

"I love Neeltje better than any girl I know." Her sympathies were all awake and protective for Neeltje as well as Nicholas.

Peter looked grateful.

There was a long pause.

She thought of Milton and Young, of Hooker and "Uncle Tom's Cabin," but a wise instinct kept her silent on these themes. She thought of Madame Baltus, but the minister's wife might suggest the sermon; so that subject remained unborn. She thought of her visit to Caty Ann, but all the dwarfs and imbeciles and idiots in the neighborhood seemed to be standing in a row before her, wizened or chattering, or askew in some physical or mental direction.

Peter, meanwhile, had been thinking too. He uncrossed his legs. He reached up and pulled his collar away from his throat as if it choked him. He placed his powerful hands on his knees, and sat stiff and erect, fixing a bold, calm, unwavering gaze on her that had its attraction—the attraction of strength, of force, of a determined will and a settled purpose.

"You wus a-speakin' about Neeltje keepin' house fer me. I want some one else to do that. Neeltje's the best sister livin', but a man wants a wumman what ain't a sister to keep house fer him."

She sat grasping the seat of her chair with both hands, her tall, slender form rigid yet shrinking, a startled negation in her eyes, as if imploring him to desist.

"I've come down the hill this evenin' on business, on a kind of errant't consarns me an' you, Susanna." He smiled, showing his handsome teeth, and the color quickened in his cheeks. But his voice rolled on without a

quaver. "I've come down with hon'able intentions. I've made up my mind you're the wunman as I might want to be my wife an' keep my house eventually. The p'int's this," he added abruptly: "'ll you keep cump'ny with me? an' ef we find we kin suit," — he drew a long, pompous breath, as if suiting on his part were a foregone conclusion, — "why," and after a pause in which he continued to hold the girl's gaze, he added more gently, "what d'ye say, Susanna? Me an' you's ben chums before now; 'll you keep cump'ny with me?"

"I can't — I can't do that, Peter," she gasped, flushing hotly.

"'ll you let me come to see you?" he inquired, persuasively, "once a week — Sunday nights?"

"You can come once — in — a while," she stammered reluctantly, having a vision of Peter, too, wandering around in the damp grass, or growing haggard and wretched, — "just as you came when we smoked grape vines on the worm fence."

He nodded good-naturedly. "That'll do fust off. Girls is always so resistin'. It's the natur' of women to resist an' the natur' of men to enj'y breakin' down the resistance."

"It's all there'll be, Peter," she now found voice to say, energetically. "Why, grandma thinks I'm a little girl, still."

"But you ain't."

"I don't know what she will say when she comes home." Her countenance wore a look of genuine worry.

"She won't mind. It's the nateral way. You needn't tell her me an' you's keepin' cump'ny. I'd jes' es soon go along cautious, fust, myself."

"I shall not keep company with you, Peter. I won't have it that way! Besides, do you suppose I'd conceal anything from grandma? I shall tell her the very first thing."

Her indignation was so intense that her head sat squarely back, her chin folding in a diminutive white crease, her mouth growing tremulous and excited. "I wish you wouldn't talk about such things, Peter," she continued, with an effort to recover her calmness. "I don't want to keep company with you or anybody — never! I am as happy and contented as I can be, now, so why should I begin to try to make myself miserable!"

His lids contracted, and he threw a long, searching glance at her, not having the energy either of affection or imagination to realize from what scanty premises she had drawn such a tremendous induction.

"Fer my part," he exclaimed suddenly, opening his eyes and startling her with a glance shrewd yet baffled, and as if an instinct of conquest had taken strong possession of him, "s' fur es I'm concerned, ef I wus a wumman I wouldn't make myself mis'able, not fer the best man livin' — but it's the truth, Susanna, an' wher-ever you got them queer ideas I don't know, it's the truth that keepin' cump'ny or gettin' in love's es intoxicatin' es whiskey. An' there is some men an' wummin git sech a taste fer it that they keep a-tryin' their hand fust on one an' then on another. That's flirtin'. 'Tain't hon'able — 'tain't what I mean — 'n' I kind o' hate," he added apologetically, "to 'nlighten you — but you're too innercent, Susanna."

She turned her head away. He took a novel pleasure in watching her silent discomfort. He wondered he had never noticed that the freckles had disappeared from her forehead and nose. He did not think her such a beauty as Neeltje, but now that he had set out to make Nicholas Storm envious, as well as enjoy a tilt himself with a girl whose presence had wrought upon him in new ways during the long service while he had sat facing her, he was determined to push opportunity to the farthest limit. He was disconcerted when she sprang to her feet as if spurred by some swift resolve, and said, with the frankness of a child, "You'd better go home now, Peter. I am tired!"

There was an unrelentingness in her voice and manner, such an absolute void of sentimentality, that nothing remained for him but to do as he was bid.

"Well," he ejaculated, taking hold of the back of his chair, and rising with a show of great reluctance, "I'll begin by keepin' good hours. The next time I come, though, I am a-goin' to stay a little longer. I hain't half had my visit out. I'll have to come round sooner'n I expected to piece this visit out."

He extended his hand.

She took it charily, dropping it instantly. She drew a long, tremulous breath.

He lingered, his hat in his hand. "When you a-comin' up to our house?"

"Please go now, Peter," and she drew away, showing her displeasure.

"Could you give me a kiss, Susanna?" His black eyes bent towards her.

"No, I couldn't," she exclaimed energetically; "I don't like to kiss."

"'ll you let me kiss you?"

"O Peter, do go!" She stepped to the door, holding it wide open.

The outside world, with its sweet, frosty air, its woody smells, its radiant moonlight, swept in, and as if some benign, spiritual influence came with it, she brushed her hair back from her hot face, while a serene conviction of protection and defence stripped her of alarm and unrest.

"Good night, Peter," she said, with the gracious, cool simplicity of an amiable child, and shutting the door quickly after him.

He walked away, feeling the coil of longing and anxiety it had amused and angered him to watch Nicholas struggle under. What he had intended to make a matter of deliberation and possibly ultimate choice, as time and circumstances might determine, suddenly became of vital moment.

CHAPTER VIII

THE slumber visiting Susanna as soon as she sought her pillow was dreamless and profound.

The moonlight came in through the parted curtains, pointing the edges of the old desk with rich, wine-colored streaks, making cross-bars on the rag carpet, and lying in broad bands athwart the bed.

She lay with her cheek in her hand, her chestnut hair tightening into rings over her round forehead, her face untouched by serious care, but an expression already there of sensitive affections and a mind imbued with thought and fancy.

When she awoke, and with the deep refreshment following from perfect sleep, the clock in the kitchen was sonorously striking twelve. She lay counting the strokes, her eyes half closed. Gradually, she became aware of the unusual brilliance of the moonlight. She touched the effulgence upon the bed, as if it were endowed with some subtle, magnetic intelligence. Everything in nature had a voice for her; and this sweet, pale yellow light, flooding the chamber, stirred an indefinable notion of companionship and ministration, as distinct in its impression as that made by the wind in the pine trees.

Presently she looked across the room to the window opening on the apple orchard.

What she saw held her breathless. She stared with the tense fixity of gaze of a somnambulist, while feeling under some terrible delusion. She closed her eyes and opened them. The face and figure were at the window still — Neeltje's face, white, pitiful, her black eyes distended, wild, and tragically anxious, her tall, womanly figure clad only in a nightdress.

"Let me in, let me in," she wailed, as Susanna sprang into a sitting posture.

It was Neeltje then!

She ran to the window and tried to open it. It stuck, and in the bustle of getting it loose, Neeltje frowned and turned away.

"Come in, Neeltje," she whispered in low, coaxing tones. But the girl wandered off, in her bare feet, under the trees, not turning her head.

Susanna, bewildered, lingered an instant, watching the sweep of the long, white gown over the frosted grass and hearing Neeltje moaning softly.

She drew on her shoes; she slipped a skirt on, and, picking up a shawl, climbed out of the window and ran towards the retreating form.

Already some distance off, Neeltje looked around.

"Wait, dear, wait for me!" cried Susanna; but Neeltje began running also, her black hair streaming in the breeze. She sped down the slope of the field towards the road, and moaning as she went as if in great anguish.

Susanna noticed how thin she had grown. "Neeltje, Neeltje," she pleaded, beginning to feel out of breath and amazed at the rapidity with which the wailing girl continued her flight.

Neeltje came to the fence. The bars were down. She reached the highway, her smooth, swinging, gliding motion never lessening.

Susanna noticed everything while continuing the chase. She saw the rim of ice along the pools by the roadside. She heard the clatter of her shoes on the bridge across the creek. She watched, while all the time running as fast as she could run, the breeze start a swirl of yellow leaves in an eddy and let them drop to the ground. She caught a glimpse of the mounds on the knoll and wondered if her mother beheld her. She saw a star shoot across the sky and disappear in the mist hanging like a veil in sheltered and swampy spots. She felt the wide solitariness of the landscape and the eery quietness of the hour, amazed that she was not afraid. She began to pant heavily, and grew apprehensively anxious; for Neeltje was getting far ahead. And finally she had to stop and then walk a bit, while Neeltje fled on like some spirit unencumbered with breath. She began running again; for Neeltje suddenly turned towards the great level field on the further side

of which was the red quarry, under the shadow of the forest growing on the ledges.

Susanna climbed the nearest fence, hoping to intercept her by a diagonal cut across lots. The blackberry vines, as if lying in ambush, tripped her, and she fell. She sprang up again as quickly, her eyes staring towards that distant white object, now fleeing straight to the quarry. She realized with a shudder that the recent heavy rains must have flooded it. She wrung her hands.

And now Neeltje disappeared from sight behind a pile of stones, the debris from cuttings long ago. Susanna strained her pace. She came into the field Neeltje had crossed, the nearness of the possible goal giving her spasmodic strength and breath.

There was a darkening of the landscape. She looked up. A belt of purple cloud had crossed the moon. The moon came out again and the world was radiant with the high, revealing light. She began to hear the wind in the pines on the ledge and the hoarser rattle of the stiffening oak leaves. Again the landscape darkened and a fold of thicker cloud and tumbled-looking, as if the wind were rising, obscured the view.

The quarry was right in front of her now. Was Neeltje back of yonder silent pile of stones? She began to go on tiptoe—almost to creep. She reached the stones. She glided stealthily forward, peering behind them.

No one was there, while a little beyond was the rim of the great pit, hundreds of feet in circumference and full of turns. Doubtless, the sockets from which the flags had been quarried were lakes and the paths and steps leading hither and thither, slimy and wet. The light seemed to go out in awful gloom as the thickest part of the cloud sailed ominously over the moon. The wind, which had been so light, broke into a short, wild whistle and died down only to be caught up by the trees as it rose again and cried along the ledges in a rising shriek.

She put her hands to her face, appalled. But her resolution did not falter. She stepped to the edge of the quarry and waited for the moon to ride forth, straining her vision, meanwhile, with futile agony, into the depths below.

The light began to return. The walls of the quarry emerged, their red sides glimmering more and more until they shone with a warm, wet, bloody splendor in the unclouded radiance. At her feet was a pool of water which caught the sparkle and glowed cheerfully. Neeltje was not there.

But beyond, concealed by a wall of uncut slate, was an amphitheatre, on whose steps they had often sat and talked. Its wide, even bottom had been a favorite place for wading when the water was shallow, and here Peter and Nicholas, in times far in the past, had sailed rafts and carried the girls for passengers.

The water must be very deep now.

She felt a sinking about the heart, and her knees trembled as she followed the circumference of the crater.

In another minute she paused, for she was at the turn where the great well would come into view. She glanced at the sky, now mottled with hundreds of flying purple clouds.

"O mother," she whispered; "O God!"

She went on. She closed her eyes as she took the last step bringing the scene she dreaded into view. Slowly she opened them. She was at the top of a series of rude steps sloping down to a wide sheet of water. It was deeply blue, rippling in the wind and washing the rocks with a soothing, lapping noise.

Rocking back and forth on the tiny waves, her gown floating on the surface, and puffing up with bubbles of air, floated Neeltje. Her eyes were closed, her hair, like a gleaming snake, waved in a thick, black coil along her arm.

Susanna sank on her knees in a horror of collapse. She cried out in the anguish of her discovery: "Neeltje! Neeltje! Mother! Come now, mother!"

But the silence remained as wide as the dismal spaces on every hand, and the girl, in a mighty effort of will, summoned her waning forces. She tottered to her feet. She tried to descend the slippery, irregular steps, down which she had so often leaped like a deer. They seemed to recede before her. Staggering, and resting her hand on the cold stones, she gradually crept down lower and lower, nearer and nearer, till Neeltje lay at her feet.

Could she touch her? She recoiled, trembling. She

put out her hand and drew it back. It must be done. A wide ledge even with the water formed the last step. If she could draw Neeltje up there! She must!

The supreme effort was made. The rescue of that unconscious body was accomplished. A great tenderness swept over her while performing this act.

She chafed the limp hands, noticing how transparent they had grown. She bent down to the shell-like ears, calling upon Neeltje in endearing tones which would have been music to the girl a month before. She lifted the lids from those beautiful eyes, starting back with a paralyzing chill on seeing their lustreless blackness instead of the velvety languor and fullness of life.

And then, with a terror for which there was no name, she realized the awful situation.

A cold sweat broke out on her face and hands. There was a loud buzzing in her ears. Then she grew warm with the mad current of her blood thrilling her from head to foot. With it came a renewal of will, of courage.

She put out her hands feebly, but gathering energy in the effort, and straightened the folds of Neeltje's gown. She carried a stone some distance to make a pillow for the head lying so pitifully low and exposing the white throat in a rigid curve. She wiped the water from the still face, already wearing the intense, desperate smile of death.

Suddenly, when this decency of respect and loyalty was accomplished, the horror came back, and, with a last, shrinking, fearful glance, she turned away, pulling her limbs, which had never known weight or heaviness before, from one step to another. As she climbed higher and higher, an uncanny desire to look back took possession of her, and a growing terror lest she might, and see again that smiling dead, dead face. There was a loud crying in her ears, as if Neeltje's moan would forever resound in the chambers of her intelligence. But she reached the level of the field, her volition still under control.

She started on a run across the frozen stubble, but presently her steps faltered. On reaching the turnpike, she sat down, burying her face in her hands. She sprang up. Neeltje, Neeltje, Neeltje! seemed written on her brain.

She began to walk. There was more to do. The Vrooms must know. She struck across the fields and up the slopes towards the forest surrounding their home, and came out in the pasture-lot. The pines, too, were moaning as she skirted their shadows. Would her life hereafter be haunted with wailing noises? She climbed the fence, starting to run along the mountain road.

A short distance farther on she saw torches. They came nearer.

It was Joris Vroom, with Greetje and Peter and two of the farm hands.

When they saw Susanna, Greetje sprang forward. "Is my Neeltje at your house? Oh, say she's at your house — safe in your bed. Say it, say it!"

"Tell us, S'anna, fer de lof of God, dat our Neeltje is wid you," and Joris, haggard and trembling, seized her shoulder.

Peter stood back. He did not believe she was there.

In a tearless, cold, brief tone, as though reading some short and necessary announcement, Susanna related the bare facts.

The little company pressed on, forgetful of her, forgetful of everything but the desolation of the quarry.

It seemed ages before she reached her own dooryard. She climbed the steps, staggered along the narrow path, and sank down on the door-sill.

What had happened? Was she dreaming? Oh, no! Neeltje had drowned herself! She got up, after a while, creeping under the locust copse towards her bedroom window. How dark it was getting! The moon must have set.

She put up her knee to climb inside. The window-sill kept rising higher and higher and higher. It was away up in the air!

Roused by the sound of a heavy fall, Celinda started up. Her room was pitch-dark. She struck a match and lighted her candle, expecting Susanna to rush in while she was in the act. But the dead silence continued.

Getting out of bed, and looking from side to side as she did so, she stepped softly to her mistress' door and opened it. A sudden draft blew the light out. Trem-

bling from head to foot, she stumbled to the bed, feeling for the slight form. The bed was empty and cold.

Fumbling on the stand at the head for a match, she relighted the candle.

Just inside the window, her shoes gone, her feet bleeding, her skirt draggled and wet, lay Susanna, unconscious.

CHAPTER IX

By the time Celinda had restored Susanna, dressed her bruises, and coaxed her back to bed, the day was breaking. She had not succeeded in obtaining any account of the strange occurrence, but, with the discreet forbearance and patience of her race, on seeing the young girl comfortable, though very white and silent, she went down-stairs to prepare breakfast.

"She kin almost always eat," she soliloquized, "an' ef I kin fix up sumpin thet'll tempt her appetite, the color'll come back and she'll begin to talk."

While broiling a chicken whose neck she had wrung herself an hour before, there was a knock at the door. The next moment it was pushed open and Peter thrust his head inside.

"How is Susanna?" he inquired briefly and sternly.

Holding the chicken at arm's length, the gravy drizzling along the floor as she walked, Celinda came forward. "What you know 'bout it?" she asked.

"Hain't she here? Didn't she git home all right? Hain't she told you?"

"She's here, and she ain't told me nothin'."

"Is she all right?" persisted Peter, anxiously.

"'S far es I know, she is!" replied Celinda, defiantly.

"Maa'll be glad to hear it," and he turned away.

"Is enyt'ing de matter to your house?" she inquired, noticing his bloodshot eyes and strained, hard, bitter look.

"Everything is the matter! Neeltje's gone an' drowned herself, all along o' Nick Storm. Ef I ketch him, I'll thresh the life out'n his body."

"Drowned herself! When'd it happen?"

"Some time after midnight. Susanna found it out. Neeltje come to Susanna's window fust off."

"Lawd Gawd A'mighty!" exclaimed the woman, letting the chicken drop against her dress.

"I must go home, I s'pose," and he started reluctantly. Looking back, he said, "Tell Susanna we're obleeged to her."

When he was gone, Celinda drew a chair before the fire and, sitting bent over, continued her broiling and soliloquizing.

"'T beats all! 't beats all! 'T seems es dough de folks 'round here, whenever dey gits into trouble, can't find no way out'n it, 'cept by killin' theirselves. My! my! my! Neeltje's done gone drowned herself! I wonder ef Mis' Susanna see it happen."

Shortly after, while the young girl was encouraging Celinda by drinking some tea and eating a bit of the fowl that had undergone so many vicissitudes, Caty Ann Van Voorhies drove up to the old gray house.

Celinda hurried down-stairs.

"I s'pose you've heerd de turr'ble news, Celindy."

"Yaas'm!" She swayed mournfully back and forth.

"Bad news travels quick!" continued Caty Ann, sentimentously.

"It do, indeed, ma'am. Trouble always comes tearin' down on folks when dey's leas' expectin' it. Here Mis' Dutton's lived year in an' year out an' nothin' a-happenin', an' den jes' es soon es she go away, everyt'ing happen!"

"I've jes' come from Mis' Vroom's. Neeltje looks beautiful! De only comfort poor Greetje teks is a-sayin' thet she always kep' a set of grave clo'es fer ev'ry one of 'em, an' so Neeltje's wus all dere fer her to lay her hands on when de time come. Dat'd be poor comfort to me. Of course ours is ready, too, — it's de proper way, — but I can't bear to look at 'em. Dere's Saskia Storm. 'Pears to me, she's always airin' hern an' a-fussin' over 'em, jes' es ef she expected to enj'y layin' in 'em an' moulderin' away in the dark. Woll, I'll go up-stairs an' talk wid Susanna a few minutes, an' den I must be joggin' along home. My man'll be lonesome ef I stay too long, an' he'll want to hear de news. Janse's es cur'ous 'bout news es a wumman."

When Caty Ann softly pushed the door of Susanna's chamber open, it was to discover the young girl sobbing violently.

"Don't mind me, dear. It's es nat'ral to cry es to laugh, an' more'n more nat'ral, de older you grow. I've jes' come from Mis' Vroomses. Dey told me all 'bout it. What courage you hed ! I've brought you one of dem little cheeses you like an' some fresh poun' cakes. Try one o' my cakes," and she extended the dainty invitingly.

"Not now," choking back the sobs and beginning to laugh, the pound cakes as comforters seeming so absurd.

Caty Ann colored, smiling apologetically, as she put the cake with its companions and laid her offerings on the table. "I s'pose your appetite is light, an'll be light fer some days. But you mus' try an' eat. Eatin's de only comfort my man teks when he's down in de mouth. You know you can't do Neeltje no good not eatin'."

"I know it," she replied submissively, the tears rolling down her cheeks again. "Please hand me that towel, Mrs. Van Voorhies. I seem to cry such big tears. A handkerchief is no good at all."

There was an eagerness in Caty Ann's clear blue eyes which Susanna understood, and presently, curiosity getting the uppermost of sympathy, she asked, in a hushed voice, "D'you mind a-tellin' me your side de story?"

The girl glanced at her appealingly, but Caty Ann in her turn looked obdurate. And perhaps even to her calm nature, starving for emotional experience of the mildest sort, the craving for the tale of Neeltje's untimely death, invested with the romance of a love rising superior to the greed of gain, was as natural as the exhilaration the Greeks sought in their vast theatres over the stories of *Œdipus* and *Prometheus*, or those luxurious sensations blended of beauty, melody, and tragedy moderns experience in witnessing the dramas of the *Nibelungenlied*.

Reluctantly and with frequent bursts of grief, Susanna related what she knew.

Caty Ann shook her head, ejaculated, wiped her eyes, and commented — a spontaneous, impressive chorus.

"Woll," she said, "I might a knowed it — I might a knowed what'd be de end on it! But, somehow, I didn't t'ink. De Vroomses always hed a leanin' to de killin' o' deirselves in trouble. An' it's always ben drownin'. Thet's de queer part. Dey say, dough, dat

she tried oder ways. But you see it wus meant she should go like de oders. She's de t'ird one—no, de fifth! Dere wus her gran'fader, ole Villem, an' her uncle Tobe, an' her cousin Yost, an' her aunt Sukey—an' her!"

"Oh, it's dreadful, dreadful!"

"'Pears to me I'd ruther wait till my time come," said Caty Ann, thoughtfully. "But dere is some t'inks differ'nt. De Stormses, too, kind o' lean dat way."

A tremor stole over Susanna. "Would you mind talking about something else?" she inquired timidly.

"Why, no! I hain't told you 'bout Nicholas, hev I? Woll, he's run away! You see de Vroomses hes let ev'ryt'ing out, dey're in sech a peck o' trouble. An' thet's made de Stormses es mad es dey kin be, an' dey're tellin' deir side o' de story. Why, 'tain't noon yet, an' I jes' b'lieve de hull neighborhood knows ev'ryt'ing."

Susanna's brow wrinkled nervously.

"Some say es it looks queer, Nick's goin' off de very night— Oh, I promised you I wouldn't, an' I won't. But I don't t'ink so. I t'ink it wus jes' a-happen so. I met Eben Van Tassel a-comin' out'n de Stormses es I come by, an' he ses Mr. Storm's ragin'—an' he can't mek out weder it's because de ole man's grievin' fer his son, or fur'ous 'cause de farm ain't ready fer winter, or 'cause dere's no hope lef' now of Neeltje an' Nick a-mekin' up. He'd laid sech a long-headed plan 'bout de farms. He's hed his eye on yourn, too—so's to mek de j'int prupperty t'ree mile long—an' now it'll never be! 'N' he's good reason to miss de b'y, fer dere's no manner o' question dat Nick's took de brunt dese two year back. His mother stan's up fer him, an' I'm jes' glad she do—I'm jes' glad she do!" repeated Caty Ann, emphatically. "Dere ain't no better young man in dese parts dan Nick Storm. He minds his own business, he wus always a-workin' from de fust streak o' daylight till dark, an' he got nothin' but growls from his faather—an' Saskia! ever sence she wus so high, dere's ben no livin' wid her, ef what ev'rybody says is true. Nick an' his mother always got along well togeder. 'T seems he's ben a-t'reatenin' to go ever sence he refused de match. His faather said fust off he hed to, t'inkin' it'd bring Nick

to terms, an' now I guess de ole man's sorry 'nough he wus took at his word. You don't s'pose Nick knowed Neeltje wus drowned an' sot off quicker in consequence, do you?"

"No!" exclaimed Susanna, with a fierce energy astonishing to Caty Ann; "for he told me more than a week ago he might leave the next day. If he had known, he would have stayed—have stayed till everything was over." She seized the towel, burying her face in it.

"Woll, it beats all how I've kep' a-comin' back to de same subject. Don't cry! When's Mis' Dutton a-comin' home?"

"I don't know. I wish she would come to-day."

"Mebbe she will," replied Caty Ann, cheerfully. "No, she couldn't come es soon es to-day, quite. But mebbe she'll come to-morrer. What took her to York, Susanna?"

"She went with the domine and Madame Baltus," replied the girl, evasively.

"I know," encouragingly, "but somethin' must a took her."

"Eben Van Tassel took them all in his two-seated carriage." She smiled a little.

There was a baffled light in Caty Ann's mild blue eyes, but she asked no further questions. Rising after a few seconds of silence, she bent over to kiss the girl. "Now keep a stiff upper lip an' don't cry no more. Hev I cheered you up a leetle? Eat dem poun' cakes, do, before dey git stale."

When she reached the kitchen, she said, abruptly, to Celinda, "What took Mis' Dutton to York?"

"She ain't told me, Mis' Dutton ain't. She's always close 'bout her business, Mis' Dutton is. How d'you find Mis' S'anna?"

"She'll be 'round soon. She's got too much spunk to be layin' in bed daytimes."

"She wus jes' tuckered out. I 'clar' I wus 'larmed."

"She chirked up consid'able before I lef' her. Mek her eat dem poun' cakes while dey're fresh. Woll, I must be a-goin'. My man'll t'ink I'm never comin'."

"Good mawnin', Mis' Van Voors. It does me good to see your face. It's es smooth an' satiny an' pink an' white es a hawlyhawk." Celinda leaned over the door.

Caty Ann gave her a beaming smile, and, unfastening the buggy, pulled herself inside with some difficulty and drove away.

Towards night, Susanna got up and went down-stairs, surprising Celinda in the midst of mopping the floor. Sancho, aged, reticent, and his once beautiful coat rusty and thinned, opened his sleepy, wise old eyes, blinked affectionately and meditatively at her, gave his tail one slow, ponderous flap on the stone hearth, and went to sleep again. She sat down beside him as far out of the way of the mopping as possible.

"I'm goin' to git supper right along, jes' es soon es I kin. We've hed so meny int'ructions to-day. Seemed sumpin like de ole times down souf — so much goin' an' comin'. How d'you feel, honey?" Celinda leaned on her broom-handle.

"I feel all right." She looked up bravely and smiled. She was still very pale, except for a high flush under her eyes, which were troubled and nervous. She rose presently.

"I think I'll do the milking."

"Now, Mis' S'anna! — you shaan't do no sech t'ing. You jes' set still by de fire an' mek yourself comfort'ble."

But Susanna got the pails and went to the barnyard.

The cows were watching for her, and the chickens, forever hungry, cawed anxiously, running to meet her. The companionship of these expectant creatures was soothing, and her manner took on an air of relief.

She went into the barn, and, filling a quart measure with corn, came out, sprinkling it over the ground and watching the ravenous brood peck and swallow and choke until there was not a grain left. The hens stood around, meditative and resigned, when convinced the meal was ended, but the roosters, ruffling their brilliant necks and chuckling with importance, as if each one had provided the recent supper, stalked hither and thither, lifting their long yellow or speckled or dun-colored claws high in the air, and threatening to pounce at one another as if trying to preëempt the territory.

The girl attended to the rabbits, and hauled down some hay from the loft into the bin for the horse, whose knotty legs and cradle back and big, plebeian head bespoke him a part of his dilapidated surroundings.

And then began the milking outside in the keen, frosty air, the oak above her head now and then dropping an acorn.

She loved the sound of the milk streaming into the tin pails, the delicious, aromatic odor of the falling leaves, and the fragrant breath of the cows, standing there so patient, so beautiful, so gentle, and so dignified, asking so little and giving so much.

When her task was completed, her thoughtful eyes seemed to have borrowed the serenity and stillness of her environment, and her step resumed the firmness indicative of conscious energy and responsibility. The horror connected with Neeltje's death had rolled its burden from her vigorous young shoulders, leaving in its stead a natural and reasonable grief and loneliness.

Mrs. Dutton remained away several days, sending no letter in the interval to tell of her whereabouts or experiences, or to inform her granddaughter of her return. When she did come back, it was after dark, on Saturday.

Susanna was watching for her, and was at the parlor door for the twentieth time that night to look down the long, white road, dimly visible in the clear starlight, when her scrutiny was rewarded by the appearance of the sole vehicle that had been seen since sunset.

It advanced rapidly, a high buggy, drawn by a spry pony, and as it drew near, the lonesome watcher discovered her grandmother inside and ran forward.

The man who was driving sprang out, helped the old lady alight, went to the back of the buggy and unstrapped a trunk, carrying it, as if it were of considerable weight, up the steps, across the dooryard, and into the parlor.

Taking numerous packages from under the seat and handing them to Susanna, Mrs. Dutton hauled her carpet-bag out by main force.

Celinda appearing at this juncture, she possessed herself of the bag, and they all went into the house together.

"Well, how are you, child? Has anything happened? — Did you get along all right?" turning to Celinda.

"Yaas'm, jes' es well es if you wus here!"

"Is there anything for me to eat? I haven't had a mouthful since noon."

"Dere's plenty. We've kep' sumpin on hand so es

to be ready. It'll be on de table in ten minutes," and bustling off, she clamped down the steep wooden stairs to the living-room.

"O grandma, is it—is it true?" asked Susanna, excitedly.

"It is. It's true!" Her manner was exhilarated, her blue eyes seemed to have triumphed over her years. "There is a great deal to tell, and a great deal to do."

"Mis' Dutton," cried Celinda up the stairs, "supper's ready."

"Come, dear. I shall give Celinda some idea of matters. She deserves the confidence, at this juncture, and she won't abuse it. It seems to me you are looking a little pale, child. Don't you feel well?"

"Oh, I'm well—but—" she hesitated.

"What is it? Tell me!"

"Why, grandma," there was a tender tremulousness in her tone, "Neeltje Vroom is dead. If you don't mind, I will tell you all about it to-morrow."

"Dead!" exclaimed the old lady, and then, kissing Susanna, she said in motherly tones, sweet to the girl's ear once more, "To-morrow will do."

Sancho bestirred himself, as they entered the kitchen, to give his mistress an old-time welcome, even sitting down beside her while she ate her supper.

And there, in that homely and time-stained room, while the beams above their heads caught the flicker from the fire, and the clock ticked loudly in unison with a cricket chirping in some unknown spot, Mrs. Dutton gave an outline of her journey and its results.

When she had finished, Susanna drew a long breath, her face in her palms, her elbows leaning on the table. Celinda exclaimed rapturously.

The traveller, picking up a chicken wing, began nibbling on it with renewed hunger. Pausing, when it was half finished, she continued judicially, "And I have told you so much, Celinda, because you are close-mouthed. Of course the neighbors will have to know a little, but I shall expect to do what talking there is done."

"Yaas'm, of co'se, 'm, 'n' I c'n 'sure you, I won't vi'lute no confidence. I s'pose it'd keep till to-morrer, but p'r'aps I'd ought ter tell you thet Mr. MacDuffy, he's come nos'n' 'round—an' I'se feared it's 'bout a mort-

gage. I've heern tell Mr. Storm, he's got a hold a mortgage on dem lower fields."

"That is true," she replied, with some satisfaction of tone. "He served notice on me two days before I went away. I happened to be alone in the house at the time. I was anxious enough, God knows—but it does not matter now."

"Can he take them away from us?" cried Susanna, "our beautiful fields?"

"I shall let him foreclose."

"Does that mean he'll take them? Oh, can't you stop it now, grandina?"

"It would be better to get rid of them, even in that way, dear. We shall keep the part that has seemed the home."

"Laws' sake, child, dey's no 'count, dem lower fields," exclaimed Celinda, catching Mrs. Dutton's tone.

"It is better for us, since we are going away, and probably never shall live here again, to let those lower fields go in the easiest manner possible, and they wouldn't bring much more than that mortgage. The interest was unpaid for three years. I mean," seeing the girl look puzzled, "the interest on the money your father borrowed, giving the mortgage as security. That is what a mortgage means."

Susanna remained silent, but looked unconvinced.

"Let us go up-stairs. You might just pick up the dishes, Celinda, leaving them to wash with the others in the morning. We shall not have such a good chance to-morrow, to see what I've brought you both, for I'll warrant people will find I'm back bright and early."

There was such an access of energy about the old lady, born of success, that Susanna kept staring at her in amazement.

The trunk having been unstrapped and unlocked, more plenty and beauty in the way of new clothing was revealed than the dilapidated gray house had ever witnessed before.

"This shawl is for you, Celinda," holding up a gay Scotch plaid of finest quality. "It will last you the rest of your days. Feel how soft it is."

The colored woman rubbed the texture critically between her thumb and fingers. "It's sut'nly all wool!

Law sakes, Mis' Dutton, how'm I ever gwine thank you!" and she proceeded to fold it cornerwise, walking over to the mirror to see its effect on her fat shoulders.

Meanwhile, Susanna was scrutinizing a pair of high boots such as she had never worn before.

"Don't you think they are too narrow, grandma?"

"You will doubtless have to squeeze your feet at first, but they are the regular size for girls of sixteen. Aren't they beautiful!"

"Yes, they are." She stuck her foot out, viewing it doubtfully, and the thick calf shoe, cut low in the ankle, and broad and square and rustic-looking, certainly bore small resemblance to the one she held in her hand.

"What do you think of those?" and the old lady threw a pair of slippers in her lap.

"Oh, how cunning! But they are littler than the shoes. They will never go on my feet—never!"

"Try."

She glanced up incredulously, but began to unlace her leather thongs.

The silence and suspense of the trio was intense when the girl thrust her toes into the slipper, a little pulling bringing the heel in place.

Celinda clasped her hands. A wave of delighted color overspread Susanna's face; she held her foot out as if it were an entirely new member of which she had become possessed by magic.

"Grandma," she said naively, after a moment of delighted contemplation, "it looks like the foot in a picture, doesn't it? I never believed when I looked at pictures that there were such feet."

"It is a Brereton foot," replied her grandmother, with some complacency. "But you haven't got the Brereton hand, Susanna. Maggie had it."

"What else did you bring?" and she hobbled along in her different shoes, excited and eager.

The true test of a fashion, whether for beauty or utility, is to display it before the eyes of the uninitiated, and Mrs. Dutton realized, with rather overwhelming force, that the contents of the trunk, as a whole, did not meet with unqualified approval. But the general result was what she had desired and expected—what might be called the shock from a battery charged with surprises

expressive of the great outside world, and treasures which only money could buy.

Tired as she was, it was midnight before her weary body reached the comfort of bed, and it required a week for the turmoil incident to her revelations and purchases to subside sufficiently for the family life to resume its routine.

Meanwhile, a letter had been received from Mr. Catherwood, in response to one Domine Baltus had sent him from New York concerning schools, and it contained the information that, as he was to be in Albany about a fortnight later, it would be possible for him to make a détour on his way back to Boston to see Mrs. Dutton.

"We must put our best foot foremost to give him a good welcome, Susanna. Although it is six years since he went away, and I dare say he is much changed in appearance, I am sure he will be the same Mr. Catherwood still. The letters he has written from time to time assure me of that. While he is here, I shall decide when we shall go and where. I must try to engage the dressmaker from Klacs to come and fix us up a little. I would like to get away by December, and to-morrow will be the first of November. Mr. Storm is coming around this afternoon about the mortgage. I shall be glad to have that matter settled before Mr. Catherwood comes. There is so much to do! Celinda and I are going to look over boxes and things in the attic, and clean and shut it up to-morrow. I am glad the next day is Sunday. It will give me a breathing spell." She looked careworn. "And there is the horse. He's got to be sold. If Celinda stays to take care of things through the winter, he will be more trouble to her than he is worth. I wish I could stop counting up the things there are to do, but, after all," and her smile temporarily effaced years and stress, "it is better to have too much rather than too little to do."

CHAPTER X

IN the course of the next fortnight, Mrs. Dutton's and Susanna's wardrobes enlarged appreciably, and although the new garments were imperfect and clumsy in many details, they had the advantage of belonging to age and youth, so that what virtues they possessed went a great way.

Susanna tried her gowns on many times, although she had not ventured to keep them on. But Mrs. Dutton having suggested to her the expediency of getting used to such a lavish outfit, she dressed herself one afternoon in a blue merino, and squeezed her feet into the high boots. She wandered from room to room with a trepidation of manner and gait foreign to her, the slippery soles and narrowing heels rendering her uncomfortable and self-conscious. Her innocent delight soon palling and a sudden weariness and disgust seizing her over being thus hampered, she went to the old desk to get a book. Jeremy Taylor's "Holy Living and Dying" arrested her attention. Going to the west window, through which the afternoon sun was shining, she sank into her grandfather's chair, and opened the volume. She had not read far before the luxuriant beauty of the great divine's sentences awoke in her a soothing appreciation of the harmony of his language; while the asceticism of his teachings restoring her to familiar experience beloved through long association, she read on eagerly about the blessedness of poverty, the renunciation of pleasure, and unconcern for the body.

Life was running at high tide through her veins, but still another life vitalized her soul. Something strenuous and serious in her nature made her delight in the warfare depicted between the things of the flesh and the things of the spirit. When it became too dark to read, she closed the book with a sense of spiritual elation.

The new boots pinched sadly. She held her foot out, looking at it for a moment. It was certainly silly to suffer like that. She went to her room and took them off, replacing them with her rusty calf-skin shoes, in whose roomy depths every toe could squirm at ease.

"Why, Susanna," said her grandmother, presently, noticing the change, "if you don't keep those boots on longer, you will never be able to go away."

"I can't help it. I have been thinking of things to wear for two weeks now, and I never want to spend as much time as that again on them. Don't you think those boots could be stretched?"

"They are too large now, child. That would never do. Dear me, I hope we are not beginning too late to civilize you."

"Grandma! Am I as bad as that?" She flushed vividly.

"Don't mind what I say. I wonder you are what you are, considering."

She stole up-stairs and put the boots on again, and with the feeling that there was special virtue in the act, according to Jeremy Taylor, since she was sacrificing her own selfish desires to the will of another.

When her grandmother saw her, the old lady said contritely, "I didn't intend you to put them on again to-night, my child."

The girl snuggled up to her a second. "I suppose grandfather would rise from his grave if I didn't show myself a Brereton."

"You are a regular Dutton sometimes. The Breretons were worldly-wise and generally successful, but the Duttons, dear, they kicked over their bucket of milk time and again because they were too tender-hearted, too loving."

"I wonder which way it will be with me." She laughed with the fearlessness of an untried future.

After tea, and while the trio were in the parlor, — Celinda freshening the fire and brushing up the hearth, Mrs. Dutton peacefully dreaming and knitting as though the making of yarn stockings were her life work, and Susanna reading and rubbing her feet uneasily one over the other, — there was a knock at the door.

Celinda answered it, and Peter, abashed over the pub-

licity of his reception, entered assertively, but with awkward consciousness.

Susanna colored vividly, and Mrs. Dutton became concerned. A general self-defence settled upon everybody.

Peter's throat grew dry. He coughed a small, pugnacious hack and tilted back his chair. His hands became very red, and his face suffused.

Presently Celinda left the room.

"Did you come with a message from your mother, Peter?" inquired Mrs. Dutton.

He shook his head, voiceless, but, in a second, regaining courage, and always resolute in accomplishing his purpose, said propitiatingly but firmly, "'Twan't no message brought me; 'twas Susanna." He smiled now, partly with pleasure, but chiefly because he had succeeded in declaring his purpose, for he had decided to enter openly and boldly upon his visits. There was that in his eye and manner, moreover, which told the whole story.

"Susanna is hardly old enough to see visitors in the evening," said Mrs. Dutton. "She always goes to bed at eight o'clock — she gets so sleepy."

"Woll, thet's nat'ral 'nough, I'm sure. I come early o' purpose, but hopin' she'd set up with me a little longer then thet."

"You're always welcome, Peter, I'm sure," continued Mrs. Dutton, cautiously; "but, after this, drop in mornings, when we are about our work — just as you did when you were a small boy."

He put his hands in his pockets, tilting his chair still further back. He was observant if cornered. Suddenly, bringing his chair down squarely, while the color stained his cheeks, he said: "I'm not a-comin' here, Mis' Dutton, 'cause I'm a leetle boy or 'cause I ever spect to be one agin. I'm comin' 'cause I'm a young man, an' I like Susanna, an' I want to court her. She said herself I could come, an' I hope it'll be agreeable to you."

"O Peter!" exclaimed the girl, reproachfully, while meeting her grandmother's eyes as if at last those aged orbs must perceive that she was grown. "O Peter, I told you you could come to see me — but that was all!"

"Thet's what courtin' is, in the beginnin'."

"Come, come, Peter," now exclaimed Mrs. Dutton,

"this will never do. You must not think of my granddaughter in this light. Susanna is getting ready to go to school."

"I kin wait," he replied briefly, after a silence resting heavily upon them all.

The widow scrutinized him, and the examination seemed to give her a realizing sense of a certain solidity of purpose. His firm jaws shut together like some mighty, inexorable machine. Deliberation rather than passion stamped his features at this moment, and meanwhile his vigilant, admiring eyes rested from time to time on the young girl as though he had no doubt of his ultimate success.

Susanna was only to a limited extent charmed by this new manifestation of his personality; she was not deceived by his apparent straightforwardness. But she was keenly aware that he seldom failed of accomplishing his purpose, although why or how, she did not know, for her analysis failed her.

A strange mixture of motives prevented her from helping her grandmother. She had a genuine liking for the big, strong fellow, just as she had cherished one for Neeltje. And Peter's courtship was a recognition of her young womanhood; it awakened, as none of the meagre friendships of her short life had done, the consciousness of her power to attract. To be admired in this manner, stirred some chord of affinity Nicholas had failed to make vibrate, and thus, though her confidence in Nicholas was implicit, and her distrust of Peter forever watchful, she sat there undergoing those swift changes of color and expression which render the face of man or woman under similar circumstances a perfect drama.

Mrs. Dutton noticed this subtle development with a pang mingled of dismay, astonishment, and reminiscence. She saw, as every older person sees, with a realization of the futility of it all, that no matter how definite the theorizing is, how rigid the training has been, how simple the childhood, that, where this new force begins to act, its vagaries are as unaccountable as those of electricity, and its affinities to be accepted as facts of which the cause oftener than not defies investigation.

As far as her tilt with Peter was concerned, nothing

remained to do but forbid him the house. This step she was not ready to take, and he had judged her pacific nature sufficiently to know that she would not adopt such an extreme measure. Moreover, he realized how few his present opportunities were, and the widow, also remembering the fact, believed that, in the brief interval left, he could do no more than precipitate upon Susanna a knowledge which must come before long; only, she could have wished that the girl's first lessons might be gained in an indirect and far more delicate manner.

The evening wore on, and still Peter sat there—enduring the silences and struggling with a kind of ponderous literalness to take part in the commonplaces of conversation.

Fortified by her grandmother's presence, Susanna let herself out in sallies of wit and observation, and was so delighted with the exhilaration of the novel situation that she had no thought of being sleepy.

And, finally, the old lady's weariness triumphing, her knitting dropped in her lap, and a nap surprised her vigilance.

"Woll," said Peter, perceiving his advantage, "I must be goin'. I don't want to. It's lonesome up to our house. Mother cries all the time, and faather mopes around, doin' nothin'." He walked slowly to the door, Susanna following. He asked her to come outside, which she did, half against her will.

Alone with her once more, he looked at her and drew a long breath.

She stepped away, her hand holding the door-knob defensively.

"I ain't a-goin' to touch you, Susanna. Come es fur es the steps an' see the moon. It must be a-peerin' over the trees by this time."

She walked down the narrow path beside him, his great shoulder looming above her.

"Woll, you'll go away, an' I s'pose you'll fergit me—but I shan't fergit you, Susanna. An' one o' these days I'm comin' after you, an' you must be my wife."

"If you begin that again, I'll run right in the house."

"Wait a minute. I want to ask you an honest question. Ef I went away an' made somethin' of myself,

would you like it better—would you like it better, Susanna?" He leaned over, looking at her eagerly.

She felt a flush of gratified power.

"I should think more of you, of course, Peter—but how much more, I don't know. I thought you said you were going to be like the other Vrooms."

He looked gloomy. "Neeltje's set me a-thinkin'," he said gravely, and Susanna, impressed, warmed very perceptibly.

He saw it and went on: "We got a letter yist'day from Uncle Tim'thy. He's a hullsale brewer in Brooklyn. He feels awful cut up 'bout Neeltje, too. He wants me to come down there. He ses ef I will, he'll give me a fine start—send me to school two year an' take me right in with him an' learn me the business. Ef you say go, Susanna, I'll go."

"O Peter!"

"Shall I go?"

"I might say yes, if it were some other business."

"Thet's a good business—lot's o' money in it!"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Tell me what to do, Susanna."

But she stood back a little way from him, her face upturned in perplexity.

"I think I'll go. You won't be here. Everythin's changin'. Ef I go, will you write to me?"

"O—yes—I—guess—so. I—"

A broad gleam streamed suddenly from the door. "Susanna!"

"Yes'm."

"You'll catch your death of cold."

"Good night." Peter squeezed her hand—squeezed it till it hurt—and walked pompously away.

"What were you doing out there?" inquired Mrs. Dutton, severely.

"I wasn't doing anything, grandma," she replied in an injured tone. "Peter was asking my advice about something. That's all!"

"What was he asking your advice about?"

"Why, about going to Brooklyn to school for two years—and after he gets through, his uncle will teach him the business."

"What business?"

"To be a brewer."

"If that is all he can find to do, he had better stay home. Was that all you talked about?"

"I never ask you over and over and over, grandma, just what you have been saying — and you ought to trust me."

"O child, it is not the trusting. I would trust you — yes!"

"Well, then, what is it?" looking at her with wide-open, steadfast eyes, illuminated by a candid, honest spirit, but kindling with irritation.

"Why, Susanna! This is the first time you were ever cross with your grandmother in your life," exclaimed the old lady, her eyes filling with tears.

"Oh, don't mind, don't mind, grandma. I didn't mean to be cross — I didn't!" and the girl flew to comfort her, kissing her again and again. "I shall hate Peter Vroom, if he makes you feel bad."

Mrs. Dutton kept clasping and unclasping Susanna's hand in her withered palm. "Mr. Catherwood will be coming almost any day, now," she said, half to herself. "Well, let us go to bed and to sleep. We haven't been up so late since we first looked over the papers."

A mail-wagon carried letters through the neighborhood twice a week, a traveller occasionally sharing the weather-stained, rickety buckboard with the postman. It was by this means of communication with the outside world that the former school-teacher was expected. But he got a chance ride instead, and at an earlier hour in the afternoon, with Eben Van Tassel, who was a general purveyor of supplies to and fro.

When he alighted, accordingly, it was to find the life in the old gray house going on exactly as he had left it, six years before.

The day was mild, but the usual big fire on the hearth of the living-room was burning, and the windows and door stood wide open, revealing the whole interior.

A pungent, disagreeable odor filled the air; for Celinda was making soft soap, the sassafras stick with which she was stirring it failing to produce any impression.

Mrs. Dutton hastened forward to greet him. In her flurry of surprise and delight, she had gathered up her big check apron half full of the dried beans she was assorting.

"I am so glad to see you! so glad to set eyes on you once more," and she laid her hand affectionately on his shoulder. "I should have known you, too, if I had met you in the wilderness. But you have taken me by surprise. I thought you would come by the mail-wagon. Here, Celinda, get something to put these beans in, and then go and set a match to the fire up-stairs."

"Tell me how you are, mother," said the young man, relapsing into the phraseology he had used when a member of her family.

"As well as I used to be, thank you — only not so strong. I am getting old."

"Oh, not yet, not yet. You will see ninety, surely, and that is a long way off."

"Perhaps," pleased with that instinctive love of life waxing more intense with years.

"You have changed very much, and yet you have kept your own look," she added.

He smiled, his face lighting up with a sympathetic comprehension of her gratification in holding on to the links connecting him with the past. He looked around. He walked across the floor, opening the door into his former room, now Celinda's. A glance sufficed. He went to the window.

"There are the locusts — and the knoll. The creek is talking as fast as ever!" he continued. He glanced up and down the road. "Where is Susanna?"

"I don't know where she is. Strolling over the farm, I expect. Every one of the fields is as human to her as I am. She has been telling them good by every day for a week, but each time she leaves them, she gets the idea they are feeling so bad, she returns and does it all over."

"She is something of a Greek, isn't she?"

"I don't know much about that. But the Breretons always loved the spot where they were born. She has a great deal to see and learn, hasn't she?"

Celinda coming back at this moment to say the fire was burning, they went up-stairs.

"I suppose, mother, we might as well have our talk now, as I am much pressed for time. I shall have to leave you in the morning."

She held up her hands in dismay. "I thought you would remain at least a week."

"I should like to. I should truly like to, but life is a strenuous concern with me these days. I have just entered upon my last year at the divinity school, and I am doing mission work besides. If I had had more money or more time, I would have come to see you long ago. I ought to have done so whether or not, for I do not suppose I shall ever have much of either."

Celinda had drawn the deep armchair of Egerton Brereton from its corner as a seat worthy of a gentleman, and it was from the black, cavernous depths of this interior that the young minister spoke.

The widow noticed how slight and pale he was. His dark hair, fine and waving, was brushed back in a thick, tumbled mass from his full, square forehead, dominated still by the heavy, arching brows under which burned luminous and intense gray eyes. The sunken temples, the hollow cheeks, the smoothly shaven face, indicated asceticism rather than constitutional languor, and there was an alertness and refinement of expression, a flexibility of muscle over-wrought and held in check by a delicately but perfectly poised self-control, that indicated a nervous organization of the highest development.

The conventional black clothes, the high-cut waistcoat, and the white tie gave him an ecclesiastical appearance, much heightened by that quality of personality called presence.

"Domine Baltus wrote me, first, that you had discovered yourself possessed of large wealth, second, that Susanna was to be educated, and thirdly, that you and he had selected me as the proper adviser concerning schools. I understand, moreover, that wherever she is placed, you wish to live near her."

She nodded approvingly.

"What do you think of Boston?"

"If we were there, we could see you now and then, couldn't we?"

"For the present year, at least. After that I may have a call to the ends of the earth—Nebraska, for instance. There is a school in Boston," he continued, "about which I happen to know a great deal; a small day-school, carried on so quietly that little is heard of it. It is owned by a board of trustees, and conducted for the benefit of their daughters and the children of

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their friends. The teachers are ladies in birth, breeding, and education. Susanna ought to spend a couple of years at such a school. Later, perhaps, you would let her go to college."

"To college! I never thought of such a thing." She looked troubled. "Do you approve of colleges for girls?"

"The college question wouldn't need to be settled now," he replied soothingly, perceiving that he had aroused certain strong, old-fashioned prejudices. "The school I have spoken of is expensive." He named the price.

She looked frightened.

"Is it too much?"

"N-o. We have had nothing so long," she added apologetically, "that any amount would startle me, I suppose."

"I can understand your feeling," he replied musingly, and she noticed how shining his sleeve was, as he rested his chin an instant in his hand.

"If Susanna went to this school," he continued, looking up, "she would make friends among the best families in Boston, and then she would be where she would not be taught nonsense, and where the culture as well as the education she acquired would be real."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Dutton, timidly, a shadow of color creeping through her wrinkled face, "perhaps they wouldn't admit her as she is now."

"I have taken the liberty of explaining the situation. Her entrance is arranged for, if you approve. I have no fears. I know Susanna."

His clear, searching eyes met the faded blue ones, which deepened with gratification. "Shall this be the school?" he inquired.

"Yes. Thank you, with all my heart, for the trouble you have taken. And," she added, "if it were a day-school, I wouldn't have to be separated from her, would I?"

"No, mother; I had thought of that, and it means much, does it not?"

"Everything to me!"

"You should be considered as well. Youth owes something to age also."

At this moment the outside door burst open, and

Susanna, with her arms full of clematis and bitter-sweet, strode half-way across the room before observing that she was not alone. She turned, startled but unabashed.

Catherwood saw in that brief interval all the mute indications of poverty, isolation, health, and the flowering of a sturdy and magnificent comeliness.

Her shoes were gray and mud-stained. Her short skirt hung in all sorts of lengths. Her long, slender hands were purple with cold. There was an edge of gold along her forehead, shading into the dark chestnut hair hanging over her shoulders and down her back. Her nose and mouth were too large for the still childish contour of her face, but they were finely cut, and the smile and bloom together illuminating her countenance on seeing the young minister seemed part of the energy making her throw the clematis and bitter-sweet tumultuously on the table and bound forward with: "Why, it's Mr. Catherwood!"

She put up her face and he kissed her. She seized his hand, holding it lovingly and wistfully, her eyes in a blaze of welcome and delight.

"I have kept the little red Bible. It is as nice as ever — and I have read it every day."

He was deeply touched. She had communicated the ardor of her affectionate remembrance. He realized that her memory of him had been adoring.

She sat down near him, studying his face, his manner, as if confirming her recollection. Her expression responded to whatever he said. She listened as if there were some melody rare and delicious in his speech. She artlessly strove to do her best, as she joined in the conversation. Occasionally, she made use of some quaint word, and with an original application, startling and refreshing. Her talk reminded Catherwood of a forsaken garden, overgrown with its own luxuriance.

The young man thought, with a degree of humor, of the effect she would produce in her school, and felt some wonder concerning the impressions a life of routine and minute amenities would leave upon a personality so marked and hitherto so unrestrained.

He went away the next day, promising to meet Mrs. Dutton on her arrival in Boston.



**PARTS THIRD AND FOURTH.—
SUMMER**



CHAPTER I

"I ~~FEEL~~ at home here, grandmamma. The air affects me as the thought of Paris does, and the skies look — look like a summary of Italian art."

It was Susanna who uttered these rather grandiloquent sentiments.

Mrs. Dutton regarded her with an expression of inquiring respect, but with mental reservations.

"I dare say the winters will be milder than the Boston ones; but I got used to Boston, winds and all. I suppose it belongs to my years, but I have had an uprooted feeling ever since we left the farm."

Susanna became momentarily dreamy and retrospective. "That was so long ago," she replied, as if it required an effort, semi-clairvoyant at the best, to materialize a past so distant. "Do you realize, grandmamma, that it is seven years since we first went to Boston?"

The old lady nodded with much emphasis. "I realize every step of the way — the two years you were at school, the four years you were at college, the year we dragged around Europe."

"But now — now, at length, you are settled in your own dear home! No more movings, no more boarding — no nothing but comfort and quiet and plenty and warmth. The temperature of this room is eighty, I do believe," and she glanced at a thermometer.

"There must be a storm coming, for I ache in every bone. People in Boston told me the climate in New York was full of rheumatism and neuralgia." A shiver ran over her. She drew a fluffy white shawl closer around her shoulders.

Susanna pushed her chair nearer the open fire and tucked an afghan about her knees.

"I don't believe New York is the matter. You are

exhausted from the travel, and those wretched tables d'hôte, and the voyage. It will all seem quite different in a month."

"Perhaps." She lay back against a down pillow and closed her eyes as if subjecting herself to a benign influence, while her granddaughter gently stroked her temples.

She was little as well as aged now, with a waxy skin, but an abundance of fine, white hair, whose beauty required no enhancement from one of those lace and ribbon figments so useful in concealing the ravages of time. There was a kind of motherly fondness in the touch and look of the young woman standing behind her chair.

Perhaps the word which would best define Susanna at this period was vigor — less synonymous with beauty in the early seventies than it is to-day; and, accompanied as it was in her case with a certain grand unconsciousness of demeanor and a proud unconcern for the small gossip of social intercourse, she was variously estimated. But the substratum of criticism, favorable or otherwise, stranded her as the peculiar product of a college education. Men talked with her to discern what was a foregone conclusion in their thought — "strong-mindedness"; and women introduced religious topics and marriage to find out whether her faith were unsettled or she were a flagrant, youthful man-hater. And nearly everybody treated her as if he were a little afraid of her, a little suspicious of her, and at the same time with involuntary admiration and respect.

As a matter of course, Susanna knew a great many things which nine-tenths of the young women with whom she was thrown affected to ignore. She knew the names of every bone in her body, every function of her physical organization, and their uses and abuses. She had read Malthus and Ricardo, and held rigid ideas concerning overpopulation. She had read Draper's "History of Civilization," and Buckle and Lecky, and discriminated between superstition and religion, and cherished ideals concerning social purity. She had a sufficiently logical grasp of tough subjects to prefer Edesheimer's "Life of Christ" to that of Farrar, and Dante's "Paradise" to Bickersteth's "Yesterday, To-day, and Forever." She understood the value of an emotional nature, but, also,

its dangers. She knew from experience that it required more candor, more ability, to think than feel, and that usually there was more need of thinking than feeling. She had large notions of personal responsibility, of generosity that was the result of deliberation rather than impulse, and frequently she chose the wrong persons and the wrong occasions for the airing of her views.

She believed that the way for all women to gain the unquestioned right to do certain things was for a few women to dare do them in the beginning. She occasionally went out after dark alone, as she told Mrs. Dutton, "on principle." In order to add one more to the applicants, and thus contribute her mite to swell the demand till there should be the corresponding supply, she applied, at night, for rooms at hotels, knowing that she would be turned away. The lady she most admired was a physician who had been obliged to set up "light house-keeping" while a medical student, because the better class of boarding-houses refused admittance to "female doctors." She arranged to begin two courses of private study during her first winter in New York, one on Law and the other on Architecture. She also showed the modern tendency to wide digression by holding off from joining the church of her fathers, desiring to study for herself the doctrines, forms, and polity of each denomination before deciding where she would be the happiest and gain the most good. All this in the seventies differentiated her.

Mrs. Dutton spent many a troubled hour in wondering whether, Mr. Catherwood notwithstanding, she had made a profound mistake in her granddaughter's education.

Every now and then, Susanna, despite her theories and her reading, did ultra-foolish things, — let herself be swayed by her emotions, or, rather, was swayed headlong by them, not recognizing them as such, and dogmatically voiced what she supposed to be her own convictions when she was simply giving a summary of the last book she had read. In a word, she was continually contradicting herself, and, with the forward looking of youth, was sublimely unconscious that what she asserted one month, she was earnestly denying the next.

It is true that "views" carry with them immense responsibilities, but, after all, the factor of personality is

dominant and, in the end, produces homogeneity; and she was, socially, of vastly more consequence than her views.

Mrs. Dutton had decided to come to New York because her property was there, but chiefly because that big, dirty, noisy, pretentious, cheerful city appealed to the younger woman with a potential charm.

They took a house in the fashionable quarter between Madison Square and Bryant Park. Its appointments were an exact result of Susanna's more recent experiences. The simplicity and primitiveness of her country habits seemed obliterated. It was as if her childish sense of the splendor of living which those ancient letters in Egerton Brereton's secretary had unfolded was struggling for reincarnation.

The conventional New York interior at this epoch was cumbersome and showy. The ceilings were covered with fantastic plaster mouldings and panels threatening to fall from their own weight. Enormous crystal and gilt chandeliers hung alike in parlors and bedrooms. Broad, gilt cornices over the windows supported stiff satin or plush draperies in vivid blues or reds, behind which, in straight folds, hung lace curtains encrusted with embroidery. Long mirrors with ornate gilt frames stood between the parlor windows. In some of the finer homes, the doors between the parlors and those opening on the hall were of mahogany, and the general bigness and height and roominess was still further enhanced by massive, wooden, Corinthian pillars, singly or in groups of two, flanking the folding doors between the parlors, the floors of which were covered with thick, gay carpets. The entrance halls were tiled in tessellated marbles, and were unrelieved by rugs. The hardwood stairs, beginning to be left uncarpeted, were kept slippery with weekly oilings and polishings. Furniture was gilded or inlaid. Chairs were ecclesiastical in design. Occasionally, a "Turkish" chair was allowed on sufferance in state rooms. The frames of pianos were square or mutton-leg, corresponding in size in direct ratio to their tonic properties. All pictures, no matter what the subject or cost, were framed gigantically in gilt. Mantels were adorned with brass clocks and high-colored bisque figures. The dining-table and buffet were of enormous

weight and size; the chairs were almost impossible to move. Open fires of cannel, anthracite, or bituminous coal gave an atmosphere of added luxury to houses heated with furnaces.

In the chambers, the same heavy splendor and sumptuousness reigned. The same gay velvet or moquette carpets covered the floors. The marble mantels were crowned with mirrors reaching to the ceiling. The bedsteads had lofty headboards. The bureaus and dressing-tables were huge and elaborate and showy. In the homes of the extremely wealthy, servants began to multiply. Occasionally butlers took the place of waitresses, and liveried coachmen and footmen appeared at rare intervals, although under protest from the newspapers and public opinion.

It was a home like this of which Mrs. Dutton was the nominal and Susanna the real mistress, — Susanna seeing diligently to it that everything represented the latest touch of style and splendor. The details of elaborate living which Mr. Catherwood feared she might be unable to assimilate, had long ago ceased to trouble her. She had proved adaptable to an astonishing degree.

Travel had done little to soften this semi-tropical American love of color, plenty, and variety. While Boston had given tone to her thought and independence to her conduct, New York seemed more her natural environment in three months than the city of smaller boundaries, but larger mental inclusions, had in years.

While abroad, Susanna and her grandmother had not penetrated a single English or continental home. They had visited the public portions of castles, some of them the historic abodes of their ancestors; but these appealed to them as domestic interiors little more than the galleries of the Louvre or the Pitti. The two women were Americans of their period. While cherishing family traditions, they shrank, while in England, from claiming or seeking privileges of pedigree. Such a course they would have thought unpatriotic.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding her present environment, in the younger woman's memory there clung a different treatment of pictures as to framing and hanging, the result of miles of walking through foreign gal-

leries; and there was in her appearance, at times, a repose suggesting reaction to simpler tastes.

Her surroundings, indicative as they were of opulence and display, were neither purchased nor possessed with this thought; nor were they held with an uneasy conscience, for she had not even an embryonic doubt of her sole right to them, though her eleemosynary fads were sufficiently numerous. That the situation did not absorb her, rendered it harmless.

They had brought valuable introductions with them, and by the time the winter opened, they were seeing a great many people and entertaining in quiet ways permissible to Mrs. Dutton's age and delicacy. But every day, week after week, Susanna was going somewhere on a tangent. The city was a great open book to her; and, as its limits were snugger and its sights fewer than now, she bade fair to take a bird's-eye view of everything in the course of the season. She attended hybrid religious services in Lyric Hall. She was a frequent visitor at the Schauss gallery and Goupil's. She went to matinées at the Academy of Music. She lunched friends at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, the Brunswick, and Delmonico's. She went to Sunday afternoon service at St. Stephen's, and explored St. Mary the Virgin's, seeking, as a Darwinian might the missing link, the point of departure between the Episcopal Church and Roman Catholicism. She attended oratorios and took part in long-winded discussions on the mooted point whether Christians might frequent oratorios and philharmonics, but not opera. She debated with her companions hours together on the degree of difference between the theatre and opera, and whether, in case a church member did attend opera, he could relax so far as to listen to Shakespearean plays with a clear conscience.

She told a man who sent her tickets to a Sunday sacred concert, that he was interpreting her effort to be liberal too broadly. She held to it stoutly that the pursuit of art for art's sake alone was demoralizing, and that the public ought to feel a profound concern in the morals of actors. She contended that church choirs should be composed entirely of Christians, or, at the least, of highly religious men and women, as their singing was an act of worship. She believed in free pews,

but enjoyed service in those churches where the pews were rented, making exceptions of "the Little Church around the Corner" and the "Church of the Holy Comforter," whither she and a classmate went frequently and held each other's hands while singing "Blest be the tie that binds."

She found out second-hand bookstores on the Bowery and adjacent streets, where she experienced the bibliophile's exhilaration in picking up rare editions, between whose musty leaves she feared small-pox or diphtheria might be lurking, although not deterred by such a possibility from the joys of possession. There was a bird-store on Fourth Avenue, where she enlarged her ornithological nomenclature and made more personal acquaintance with all kinds of rare winged creatures than she could in the then scanty collection of half-feathered and mangy fowls moping in the Central Park menagerie. She tried mission work under the supervision of Domine Baltus, and went to the Tombs once a month to sing to the prisoners. She accompanied Dr. MacBee to the woman's hospital, where her cheeks burned and her eyes flamed over stories she heard of the brutality and desertion of men who had dared be fathers and were too base to be husbands. She shocked the matron by declaring, with a grand enthusiasm, to a bevy of girls who had been unhomed and uncitizenized, that in time there would be laws under which both men and women would be imprisoned or fined for such conditions as they represented. She went one night with Dr. MacBee to the Morgue, and when she saw a girl, strong and youthful as herself, richly clad, unknown, disgraced, condemned to a pauper's grave, she asked her law-teacher, the next time she saw him, how soon she would be ready to begin criminal law. She paid her taxes on such property as her grandmother had already given her in her own right, under protest, because she had no voice, direct or indirect, in their assessment. On her twenty-fourth birthday she joined the suffrage movement.

And meanwhile, some of the ties cemented in the old gray house were being renewed. Domine Baltus and Madame took dinner with them once a week, the domine having built up a stirring, throbbing mission work on the East side.

Nicholas Storm, now a prize instructor at Columbia, had called several times, Susanna feeling uncomfortably agitated whenever he left her. Peter Vroom, too, had come over from Brooklyn, as soon as they were settled, and she realized that he was holding on to his matrimonial purpose with Dutch tenacity.

Towards the holidays, there were paragraphs in the papers and gossip in society, of a new minister for the Calvin Memorial. The congregation was Presbyterian, but the proposed clergyman was Congregational. There was a great deal said of his learning and eloquence, and of him as a representative of the old-fashioned type of ascetic simplicity in speech and conduct. A month later, it was officially announced that the Rev. Louis Catherwood, D.D., had accepted the call and would begin his pastorate on the first Sunday in March.

When Susanna announced this fact to Mrs. Dutton, she drew a deep sigh of relief. "That settles it, dear, where I shall attend church. And I hope it will put an end to your roaming all over the city on Sundays. We must take a pew."

"I will see about it this very week, grandmamma. I shall, of course, go with you in the morning."

"The Memorial is so near I might like to go in the evening, especially when spring opens."

"I shall sit beside you, dearie, every single time. It shall never be said that I let you go off by your poor lonesome self." The girl knelt in front of her, holding on to the arms of her chair and looking up with docile affectionateness.

The old lady's chin settled upon the chemisette adorning the front of her gown, her serious, aged eyes resting with a kind of steadfast inquiry on her granddaughter.

"You don't know what to make of me most of the time, do you, grandmamma? I am not sure myself, what is taking place in me. When I think of that Susanna who wore calf-skin shoes and calico dresses the year round, who had no ambitions but only affections, I can't tell whether it is a development, a transformation, or a case of steady degeneration."

The widow smiled humorously, shook her head, looked up thoughtfully to the ceiling, and sighed.

"You love me just as much, don't you, grandmamma?"

"More!" There was a tremulous eagerness in her voice. "More! every day of my life."

"Better than anything or anybody?" adjured Susanna, in longing tones, snuggling her head against Mrs. Dutton's breast.

The thin, wrinkled hands clasped with caressing energy that youthful neck, above which the dark chestnut hair curled to a high, fluffy knot.

"Grandmamma," continued Susanna, presently, pulling herself away a little, "Peter is coming over this evening. I ran across him in the Moody and Sankey meeting, yesterday. Mrs. Bushnell, you know, has been urging me to attend with her; she promised to take me into the rooms where people are under conviction, so that I could see for myself how simple and real it all is. She says Mr. Moody seems to her a prudential stop-gap at a dreadful crisis. After hearing him, she goes home convinced that the world was made in six days, that the whale did swallow Jonah, and that Joshua did stop the sun."

The old lady suppressed a swelling sigh. "Was the meeting profitable to you?"

"I can't say, darling. I was making a study of it. One has to estimate the mesmeric effect of thousands of people fixing their thought on the same theme, of two men like Mr. Moody and Mr. Sankey, with the physique of athletes, thoroughly imbued with the truth of their belief—and—the emotionalism of the hymns and melodies. I was deeply interested, very respectfully interested. I intend to go again."

She spoke with nervous energy. She was in that strenuous condition in which everything pressed upon her the necessity of personal judgment. She felt obliged, for her own comfort, to reach convictions on great questions which centuries of civilization had been forced to leave open.

When Peter called in the evening, he was ushered, by the butler, into what Susanna called the nucleus of her library.

There was a luxurious settee at right angles with the fireplace.

Susanna sat down in one corner, the light at her back

etching the little curl which had formed in her neck and throwing a rosy shadow along the outline of her cheek and forehead. After a brief pause, Peter sat down in the other corner.

"Do you remember our old kitchen fireplace, Peter, with the backlog and the cranes?"

He nodded. "The thing I remember most plainly about that kitchen is a night when you were still a little thing. Mother had sent me down for a 'pinch' of tea. There were at least twenty big pumpkins standing over the floor. And you were sitting on one of them, eating a bowl of bread and milk."

She smiled. "And grandmamma sat at the table making her supper of sweet apples sliced in buttermilk, I suppose. I never could enjoy that Dutch delicacy."

"I wish I had some this minute," glancing around the apartment with a growing curiosity. The wall spaces were occupied with bookcases of a heavy, ornate design. Some of the shelves were only partially filled. One case was entirely full of big books.

"You haven't caught my idea, have you?" she laughed. "I shall have to explain it to you. The full case contains encyclopædias, dictionaries, and that sort of thing. Those I bought in one lot. But my plan concerning other books is this — to buy a work only as I feel the need of it. Then I shall at least dip into every volume that finds lodgement here. There will be no uncut leaves growing yellow with age behind those doors, no strange authors hibernating in space so precious. Each will be a friend; for if, on examination, I find a book worthless, — representing, let us say, neither strength, refinement, truth, nor beauty, — away it goes." She pointed to the fire.

"You would not burn them, would you?"

"I certainly should."

"But you might give them away."

"Ah — to the organized charities? I have seen too many of those jumbled collections to have any meanness of that sort."

Running his eye along the cases, Peter said, practically: "There is a lot of room wasted. But perhaps you care more for wide partitions and all that scrollwork. Your cases look to me as though they had been built for the sole purpose of using up walnut."

"They do, that is a fact!" she replied in a low tone of conviction. "Why have I never seen it before! Oh, dear, dear, you have ruined my pleasure in this room, Peter. I begin to hate those cases already." She shot an admiring glance at him, being still too young to appreciate the approbative rather than the destructive method in criticism, and much impressed with the evident sanity of his view. She thought of the lessons in architecture, and said apologetically, "I am on foundations still."

"It seems to me you had better start up-stairs."

"I do wish, Peter, I had as much good common sense in a day as you have in an hour."

He raised his hand deprecatingly, but he was flattered. He became egotistical. "I know when I am getting what I want. I suppose it is your plan to purchase several thousand volumes, but there is no place for them here."

"I see it, I see it," she said ruefully. "I shall punish myself by retaining these horrid receptacles till they are filled—and by that time I shall have studied interiors."

"Oh, pshaw, study less and use your wits more. You will spoil your eyes if you go on studying. You must enjoy yourself. That is what you are young for."

Her color deepened. She loved pleasure, but the tribunal of her self-approval was exigent, and at least half the study was pure delight.

"Make books out of people, and you will get along all right," he added oracularly.

"I am seeing no end of people, too. It all keeps me frightfully busy. I think grandmamma feels a little lonesome, sometimes, because I am so subdivided."

"I am sure she does. I don't feel certain, much of the time, from the way you fix your eyes on space, whether you are talking to me or to some phantom between the floor and the ceiling."

She broke into a smile. As she met his steadfast, admiring gaze, she flinched a little.

"I have been as patient as Jacob—and as meek," he continued.

"But at your own risk. That was our agreement, Peter. These matters can't be hurried."

"Love travels as fast as light, sometimes."

"Love that is light, perhaps."

"Am I never to be rewarded?"

"Rewarded! You selfish thing."

"All men are selfish. That fact is an axiom."

"But not accepted as such in feminine mathematics."

He laughed, fidgeted irritably, and got up, walking several times across the floor. "Don't you care for me at all?" he asked, halting suddenly in front of her.

"Possibly as much as I did seven years ago — no more."

"Do you care for somebody else?"

She slowly shook her head. "I don't see what that has to do with it. To have an empty heart does not signify that a particular man has any better chance of filling it. That if a man keeps on applying he is sure to gain admittance, is an exploded theory."

"College has spoiled you for a woman," he exclaimed bitterly.

"You mean that it is already beginning to force men to readjust a few of their mediæval opinions concerning women. It seems to be about as dangerous to stir their sluggish, sensuous thoughts on this subject as it is to tease an angry snake. My college has helped make me a woman." She looked at him imperiously. "Why should I marry, unless it seems a lovelier, sweeter thing than all else? What gain otherwise would there be in it? I have a home, freedom, power, as much love as I am conscious of needing. My thoughts, my fancies, my affections even, except only my devotion to grand-mamma, enjoy vagrancy at present. I should have to feel some supreme assurance of desirability, of fitness — of oneness, to promise to shut myself in and up to the thought of a single man; under the best circumstances, it would scare me to death, for fear I might after all have made a mistake. And if I continued to desire to possess him, he might tire of me. One never knows."

"You do not realize your own attraction. Have I wearied of you?"

"Ah, Peter, you have never won me. That makes all the difference in the world." She smiled, and with a glance of nonchalant irony continued: "How can I know how many admirations you have cherished? As long as

you are my friend, it is a matter of indifference to me. But if I loved you, I should grow jealous. I should want to feel convinced that you had never once been diverted from your allegiance since we left Arcadia, — that you had never been Amaryllis to some Chloe, — and I am told it is contrary to the nature of things to expect, let alone demand, such absorption from the ordinary man."

He had turned his back to the fire, and stood looking down the length of the room while she talked. He did not reply. There was a speculative, arrested expression in his eyes; apparently, he was trying to make out the title of some book.

Susanna had reached up her hand, clasping the sofa behind her. Her head was thrown back, resting on her hand. The line of cheek and throat showed white and tender. But there was a firmness in the round, full curve of her chin, and the clear intentness of her honest eyes, denoting tenacity of purpose and closeness of observation. She realized that his absorption in the title was assumed.

"You do not answer me, Peter," she said, after a long pause.

He gave her a brief, hard, superior glance. "Women take the past of men with a good social position for granted."

She shook her head softly and deprecatingly. "Not in this enlightened age. A woman feels she has as much right to a man's past as he has to hers."

"She is at perfect liberty to make inquiries."

"That is precisely the most useless thing she can do. She may, indeed, make discoveries."

A slight quiver passed across his shoulders.

"I can't put my finger on the difficulty, and I can't clearly express what I wish to say; but somewhere in the social structure there is a stratum which keeps its own secrets. Even my wise friend, Dr. MacBee, says the perfection of the system baffles her."

"You do not know what you are talking about, Susanna. There is really nothing for me to say, when you let yourself go on so at random."

Her lips straightened. A nervous tenseness wrinkled the delicate contour of her brows. Suddenly her features relaxed; she smiled thoughtfully.

"Should you ever talk to me of love again, Peter, you have supplied me with an answer."

A white streak, like the track of frost, crept down his cheek. He was profoundly moved and there was a kind of desperate discouragement in his manner.

"I shall talk to you again, and you will reply as a woman, not as a man. There is such a tremendous difference between us, you women, we men, that it can't be bridged over with confessions and explanations and analysis. There are chapters in a man's life answering to what you call vagrant fancies in yours, — that is, the impressions left on him are just as fleeting. They are shadows merely on the one great, absorbing, purifying passion he is bound to experience sooner or later."

She flushed with impatience and incredulity. "We have struck against the usual snag. What do men know about women? What can they know, except as we tell them or they dissect us merely as bodies."

"If I did not know you for the best and purest woman on this earth, I should say you had a morbid curiosity." His eyes snapped.

"That is a cowardly fling and a hackneyed assertion. My curiosity is no more morbid than that of the priest at the confessional, the surgeon in the hospital, or of the judge on the bench. It is inquiry rather than curiosity. It is a legitimate means to a most important end. Grant that it is curiosity; it is coldly intellectual, unemotionally moral, — the mildest possible attitude of any woman towards any man who dares ask her to give him herself.

"We were little children together, you and I, Peter," her voice grew reminiscent and melodious. "We talked without reserve in those days on everything we knew, and I had a fancy we could now. Oh, I feel choked at the very thought of marriage, when this veil, behind which I catch glimpses once in a while, is forever hung before the eyes of women."

He rose and she let her eyes rest coldly upon him; then, as if to change the subject, but also effectually restore a general family relation, she said: "Grandmamma bade me invite you, the next time you came, to drop in some Sunday evening, soon, to take tea with us. She clings more and more tenaciously to old associations, and she is making an effort to gather her former friends

about her for Sunday night supper. You may meet Domine Baltus and his wife—and, possibly, later, Mr. Catherwood.”

He started at the mention of Catherwood’s name, but replied indifferently, “I shall be delighted.”

She smiled, and apparently the heat of the discussion was bridged over. She accompanied him to the door. He lingered.

With an amiable acquiescence which neither detained nor hindered him, she waited his pleasure.

Her presence was big and stately as she stood there, and there stole over Peter a momentary query whether his talk had not been arrogant and presumptuous and calculated to fill her with suspicion. An overmastering impulse made him start towards her. He saw the recoil in her eyes and halted awkwardly.

Recovering himself, he said, with a forced accent of cordiality, “Tell Mrs. Dutton that I am coming at the very first opportunity.”

She bowed, affability, invitation, but impersonality blended in her glance.

They shook hands, and he went out.

CHAPTER II

SUSANNA presently went up-stairs.

Mrs. Dutton, ready for bed, was sitting beside the fire, a thick, loose gown thrown over her nightdress. A little old-fashioned cap held her hair smoothly in place. Her eyes, seen through her spectacles, looked large and glassy. A Bible with coarse print lay open on a small table beside her.

"What kept you so long?"

"Our friend, Peter Vroom, was the wicked cause of this delay. H'm! H'm!" she yawned. "He's the same old Peter."

The widow's face sharpened as his name was mentioned.

"He is coming entirely too often, Susanna. It frets me."

"Don't let it, grandmamma. Peter is like a bulldog. He will never let go unless conquered by sheer brute force, and I am hardly prepared to exercise that. I understand him well enough."

"You like him better than you think you do, child; it worries me to death."

"Now, it needn't worry you, I assure you it needn't. I do like him, it is true. There was a sort of good-fellowship between us, when we were children, you know." She smiled. "Peter always got the upper hand in those days until he gave me some wormy cherries, passing them off for good. I have liked him with a reservation ever since. I suppose I shall always like him—nothing more." She looked down fondly on the old lady, a touch of invulnerability in manner and tone. "He is coming to take Sunday night tea with you soon."

"That is the time for him to come, and the only time, when there are other people here."

Susanna clasped her hands behind her, glancing about the room with the expression of one intent on refraining from argument. She always felt more like a little child in this chamber, and Mrs. Dutton treated her like one here, despite her twenty-three years. It was the only room in the house linking the past with the present.

Standing out from the wall in old-fashioned stateliness, its high posts polished till their St. Domingo mahogany glowed with pristine lustre, towered Egerton Brereton's bedstead. Its broad expanse and snowy valances and long bolster and pillow cases seemed to take up a great deal of space. The beloved secretary had found a niche beside the mantel. The mirror belonging in the farm-house parlor now surmounted a low dressing-table. The cavernous haircloth chair which had stood near the west window had been upholstered with a view to making it a downy refuge, and it was in this Mrs. Dutton was sitting. The portrait of the girl's great-grandfather hung beside the bed.

It was wonderful how these venerable relics, put in repair, and with the setting of a high ceiling, big windows, and a velvet carpet, gave a superior dignity to the room, and, with the old lady in their midst, made an oasis in the gaudy, cold, and cumbersome appointments characterizing the rest of the house.

Susanna's college education was a fact which Mrs. Dutton could never quite concede as something of potential value to the girl herself. She had yielded to it reluctantly, through her granddaughter's own enthusiasm on the subject and Mr. Catherwood's persuasiveness. That an earnest, vigorous mind, although rigidly disciplined and logically trained, should apply itself with ardor to Bible criticism, seemed to the old lady like a departure from the faith of her ancestors. That conventionalities pertaining to dress, to the relations of the sexes, to social forms, to political movements, should demand from a girl capable of distinguishing between cause and effect, antecedent and consequent, usage and right, expediency and morality, the same personal investigation stimulating the post-graduate study of the young lawyer, or theologian, or economist, filled her with surprise not unmingled with fear. And with each passing year, Maggie, dead so long ago, became more and more the type of what

Susanna should be. Any divergence from this pattern, simple, loyal, self-sacrificing, and domestic, was a decline, not an advance. At times, the venerable woman did perceive that her granddaughter was all this, and more; but the addition remained an unknown quantity, endured but not accepted, wondered at but not admired. And though she was a shrewd observer, and with peculiarly unfettered independence of speech and action, her knowledge she claimed to be the result of experience chiefly, and her conduct, the prerogative of age.

Peter Vroom, — all the Vrooms, — the Storms, the Bols, and that entire Dutch people among whom Susanna's youth had been spent, were a tainted race, stamped with hereditary insanity and decline, and to be shunned in intimate relations. But the girl went further in her thought. Since there had been decline through known causes, just how much and what was required to initiate a better condition? Her perception had deepened that Peter seemed as fixed as a Jew in his racial type. There had been no divergence, except in speech and manner. He had assimilated rather surprisingly in these respects. But mimetics was an art practised by monkeys, parrots, etc. Peter's point of view had none of the spring, the openness to new convictions, which made every subject she pursued such a delight. His nerve-power to hers defined in volts was too meagre to start a single enthusiasm. Each time she saw him, she understood better that he was, indeed, the same old Peter. There seemed to be but one feeder to his mental vitality — crass common sense. His affections revolved with a dull tenacity about his mother's memory and his birthplace, but there was no poetry in their expression. They seemed rather to run in the groove of atavistic habit. Everything about him — his big, handsome body, his ruddy skin, and clear, cold, dark eyes — made Spencer's theory of accumulated motor-force and material need combined, forming, as a resultant, nerve-force, the equivalent of which is man, body, mind, and soul, probable; there was so much body, so little grasp of generalities, and a minimum of spiritual force.

She merely played with this theory; for she realized, if she made Peter a Spencerian fact, she would have to make a man like Mr. Catherwood, also, quantity not affecting the validity of the argument.

In Mrs. Dutton's thought there was but one ultimate destiny for a woman — marriage. As Susanna looked down the vista of years, she saw many stately corridors — one leading to marriage, another to fame, another to a sequestered life shut in to the charm of books and music and a choice companionship, another to a sublime and martyr-like devotion to the truth of some great cause. She explored each, as opportunity offered, and longed, with that fierce energy and appropriation of youth of all that is beautiful, to embrace everything in her grasp.

"Grandmamma," she said in a firm but tender voice, "I do a lot of silly things every day of my life, nobody can know it better than I; but there is one foolishness you may set your heart at rest about; I shall never marry Peter Vroom. I might have done so if we had lived on in that old gray house. What a little goose I was one night, there, so flattered, so triumphant over you, because you wouldn't see what everybody else saw, — that I was growing up." She smiled entreatingly, as she sat down on the arm of the old lady's chair. "My college has rendered Peter forever impossible."

Mrs. Dutton reclined her head against the strong, lithe figure. "Oh, I don't mind the college, if you will only be loving and simple. But it takes my breath away, when I hear you arguing with Domine Baltus on St. Paul's disposition, or with Judge Wise on taxation without representation. I — wouldn't do it — quite so much — if I were you."

Susanna stroked her cheek, a meditative chuckle rippling from her throat. "Well, I will try not to — at least, I won't start in first; perhaps I do carry things with a pretty high hand. One never can quite read one's own impulses, convictions, limitations." She forced herself out of the introspective trap into which she was falling, afraid of giving her grandmother a weapon for future use. "I wish I could take myself and everybody and everything more for granted. Oh, no, I don't, really. I couldn't tolerate myself if I were an amiable poodle of that sort. Shall I read now?" kissing her grandmother.

Mrs. Dutton handed her the Bible.

The girl turned the pages thoughtfully. She looked

up, her hand resting caressingly on the open volume, a very beautiful gentleness in her expression as their eyes met. She began reading the Ninetieth Psalm in low, impressive tones.

"'Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations.

"'Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.'"

She looked up again, and they exchanged glances of mutual reverence and trust. When she had read the seventeenth verse, she said humbly, "That is for me."

"Read it over, dear," said Mrs. Dutton, motherliness and love transfiguring her venerable face.

And Susanna read: —

"'And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.'"

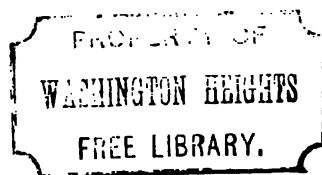
Continuing with the Ninety-first Psalm, she read with increasing fervor, giving each verse that personal application so dear to the heart of the believer. On finishing the ninth verse, she said, "All the rest seems to me like a special promise to you, grandmamma," and there was a note of extreme tenderness in her voice as she went on: —

"'There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation.'"

They sat a moment in silence after the reading had ceased. Then with some difficulty Mrs. Dutton rose, and kneeling before the old chair offered a short prayer, both joining in "Our Father."

The younger woman lingered till her companion was in bed, kissing over and over the little, white, wrinkled

face and doubling the sheet smoothly under the aged chin. Then she turned down the light and went into the adjoining chamber, casting back a glance, as she did so, full of maternal solicitude, as though she were leaving behind a nursery of her own children.



CHAPTER III

On a stand at the head of Susanna's bed lay the red Bible Catherwood gave her. She did not often read it now; for its cover was stiff, its print fine, and it had gradually become the granary of youthful sentiment in the way of pressed leaves, flowers, and scraps of poetry, most of which she had outgrown, but not to the point of throwing them away. The Bible itself, however, was a bond whose possession thrilled her, although she had not seen the giver in several years and knew little of him except through occasional letters which Mrs. Dutton received.

At the close of his divinity course, and after a year of study in Germany, the fund for which he had earned from tutoring, preaching, and book-canvassing, Catherwood accepted a call to a church in Michigan, where he had remained ever since, and with a solid growth of reputation resulting in an invitation to fill one of the oldest pulpits in New York.

The papers from time to time now contained paragraphs giving an outline of his previous life, the membership and financial prosperity of the church he was leaving, and the social status, conservatism, and corporate wealth of the congregation he was about to serve. Comparisons were instituted between Eastern and Western methods of attaining pulpit success. The "drawing" quality of this or that metropolitan minister was the subject of additional comment, and much was said about the needs of new methods in pulpit oratory, debt-raising, and ability to attract large masses of hearers.

Catherwood's age, thirty-four, was laid stress upon — one paper prophesying his success because he was young, another predicting the inability of any man under forty to stand the critical ordeal of the Calvin Memorial.

Susanna threw the paper down one morning at breakfast with a look of contempt. "I have not read one single inquiry about his character or his Christian experience. For my part, I don't see how any man of spirit can decide to be a minister these days. It is getting to be a miserable calling, miserable!"

"The papers take their cue from the church members," said Mrs. Dutton. "Mrs. Tweedy has a pew in the Calvin Memorial, and she told me that the church had reached a pass where something had to be done—consolidate with another, or draw in new life—or just go under. Catherwood was called because he is eloquent and has lifted a big debt from the church at Whirlpool." The old lady sighed contemplatively. "Everything costs so much," she added. "It seems to give life such a threadbare, poverty-stricken aspect! Mrs. Tweedy says that the Calvin Memorial is so old-fashioned inside; the elders think that is why the younger element stays away; they are hoping Catherwood will be so popular that next summer they can renovate the interior and put in steam heat and stained-glass windows, and begin a new organ-fund."

"I pity him, I pity him from the very bottom of my heart!" exclaimed Susanna, climatically. "I wish Domine Baltus were young once more. He would be the minister for that sort of thing. He would soon stop such nonsense."

Mrs. Dutton shook her head. "Domine Baltus has had his day among his equals, he says. He is only good for mission work now. But he likes it; he is content."

"I wish the church—some denomination—appealed to me more, grandmamma. But, as soon as I get acquainted with the inwardness of any particular one, its machinery becomes visible, and then, before I know it, I am listening to a sermon to see what its fetching qualities are, or to a choir to find out whether its soprano rivals the soprano of another and more popular one; or I watch the pews to discover whether they fill with strangers, or substantial, wealthy, regular sitters; and then there are the big fairs with their jealousies, suspicions, discontent, and anxiety. I saw that side of things while helping Mary Bartles at her table the week before Christmas. The thing one starts out to go to

church for is so soon entirely lost sight of. That is why I rove around, content to put a dollar on the plate, and give my thoughts, my fancies, or my emotions rein as the occasion may permit."

"I don't approve of your course, Susanna. We should remember that if the churches are groaning under the money question, everything and everybody else is. Look at this house — what a big, expensive affair it is getting to be! I hope it is more of a comfort to you than it is to me."

"O grandmamma, I thought you liked it. I am sure I take the care of it off your hands. You have only the expense. It is a comfort to me — a satisfaction. It doesn't wear on me. I won't let it."

"Then you shouldn't let the machinery of a church trouble you."

She looked baffled, but, rallying, replied: "The church should appeal to my higher nature. I wish to feel strictly religious when I go to church. I don't wish to be troubled by a single worldly notion or have my æsthetic enjoyment diminished in the least."

The old lady gazed at her with a fixed, wondering stare.

"What is the matter, grandmamma? What have I said?"

She shook her head as if discouraged. Looking up in tears, she exclaimed, "O my dear, my dear, if only you had never gone to that college, you would have been just right."

Susanna flushed. What right had her grandmother or anybody to make her college stalk ever in the foreground like some ghost guilty of consequences for which she alone was responsible!

Presently her countenance cleared. "It is not the college, grandmamma. It is I. Perhaps I learned more glibness of speech at college, but what you heard was my lazy, luxurious self — the part of me which likes to be amused, the part of me which does once in a while get tired of small responsibilities and goes to church to forget them. I suppose the truth of the whole matter is, and the pity of it is, that the economies attending the support of a church seem to be brought too prominently forward, and that the minister these days has to bear

burdens which others ought to help him carry; people like myself, for instance, who feel a little drawing of duty, but not enough to compel them to action. And then, too, the status of the minister has changed — a fact to which we try to close our eyes. Nobody now believes that ministers are depositaries of universal knowledge. A man who pretends to that sort of thing has to be something of a charlatan. One hears on all sides that churches are opportunities for ministers and their families; opportunities for what? To do good? Not a bit of it. To gain culture; think of that!" she laughed melodiously. "To live in a better parsonage, or manse, or rectory! To eat better food and wear better clothing, and have educational advantages and meet better society! How can people who already have these things look to such men and their families for inspiration! They simply can't and they won't and they don't. They go to church, if they go at all, to set an example, and they find their inspiration from situations and people and opportunities involving no obligation. And really, who wants spiritual leaders these days? Certainly not people who can read and think and judge for themselves. I would a great deal rather sit down on a Sunday afternoon with a good commentary and some astute German writer like Delitsch, a Roman theologian like Newman, a Unitarian like Channing, a Baptist like Harper, an Episcopalian like Cheyne, a Methodist like Foster, a Presbyterian like Briggs, a Congregationalist like Abbott, and study, say, a chapter in Isaiah, or a passage in Corinthians, than hear most sectarians argue the matter from the standpoint of their confession of faith."

She paused for breath, her eyes dilated.

Mrs. Dutton's lips showed a neutral, straight line and a hurt motherliness, as if a wilful child had dared slap her in the face.

"There is one thing, grandmamma, that appeals to my notion. It might possibly touch me, if I met it, and that is, sublime goodness with a lot of learning, culture, worldly wisdom, and the pluck of a soldier thrown in for ballast. Peter Vroom and I have talked this thing over more than once. Peter says such men do not make fools of themselves, nowadays, by hampering themselves with a pulpit. They go into business. It is the

weaker ones among the young men who are entering the ministry. Peter says it is all they can do — and at least the calling gives them a position."

"Oh, Peter Vroom! Wisdom will die with him," replied Mrs. Dutton, at last, with tremulous asperity. "Peter likes to believe such nonsense. It suits his idea and his character. What about those wormy cherries, Susanna?"

"I am merely quoting Peter, grandmamma, because he mingles with men. He hears their talk with one another."

"I'll warrant if you could follow him about and see the men he talks with most, you would set less store by his observations."

"All the same, grandmamma, the ministry, under present conditions, is a calling to take the grit, the manliness, and even the spiritual force out of a man, unless he has tremendous powers of resistance. I wish Mr. Catherwood had chosen some other profession."

"But he couldn't! He had a call."

A cold, speculative light glinted through the girl's eyes. She was not disposed to dispute this statement, although she doubted its fundamental validity.

Her grandmother, reading that flash of negation, sighed, withdrew into herself, and grew homesick and lonesome for Maggie.

Shortly after reaching New York, Catherwood called. Mrs. Dutton was driving, but Susanna was at home.

The butler ushered him into the long parlor. The light was subdued, but the mirrors and heavy cornices and great crystal chandelier, the thick, gay carpet and pale blue satin hangings, the big paintings in broad gilt frames, the general largeness and brilliancy and luxury of everything, struck him with the force of a new and vigorous impression.

So this was the setting in which he was now to behold the little girl whom he had carried picka-back through the forest and over those muddy country roads; that larger girl, whose face and speech, as he had seen and heard her the last time in the old gray house, had haunted him with a vision splendid of the possible woman; and that other girl, yet still the same, whose course through the Boston school he had directed with a

secret pride in the truth of his prophecies on her arrival. He had bidden her good by as she turned her face towards college, and he, his energies towards the West, with a sinking at the heart which let him know as no other trial or privation of his life had done, what was the strength and nature of the affection he had been secretly cherishing.

He had stood the test he had imposed upon himself. He had left her unburdened with the knowledge of his love and open to the opportunities love showers upon the pathway of a girl dowered with beauty, wealth, and talent. If she were still free, his turn, his chance, had come, and he meant to win if he could. And if she were not free, — his long, thin fingers gripped themselves into the palms of his hands with a hurt, — his course was equally clear. He still had the church.

He carried the logical tenets of Calvinism into every event of his life. If Susanna were to be his, as his profession was, — through some imposition of knowledge which left no other choice possible to him, — she would know, as he would. Though his love was of a supreme nature, and he had had full opportunity, while her youth lay open like a book before him, to realize the magnificence of her affectional capacity, he did not want her for his wife on any other basis than the one which had made his career consistent from the beginning.

He glanced curiously around the room. Did it express her? He understood that it might, now. Color, bigness, warmth, luxury, were arrogant in their assertion. He walked up and down while waiting for her. After a while he heard her step on the stairs. He paused between the front windows, and presently beheld the reflection of the staircase in the immense mirror opposite the parlor doors and where Susanna for an instant appeared like a full-length portrait in a frame.

A shiver of joy and admiration agitated him, leaving him cold, dignified, and pale.

The next instant she swept into the room, both hands extended, her face uplifted, her figure, her step, her expression, radiant with welcome.

When Catherwood took her hands, possibly the depth of his emotion communicated itself; for her chin lifted involuntarily, a soft darkness and warmth of color

flashed through her eyes, her lips trembled with inquiring tenderness; as she drew her hands away, there was an uncertainty in her attitude. Recovering herself, she sat down, and he took a chair near her.

As their talk went on, with something of an assumption of intimacy on both sides, he realized the tremendous gap yawning between her past and present. He tried to bridge it by gentle allusions to her childhood, her school life.

She listened, smiled, and once or twice relapsed into tender reminiscence, telling stories of her thought of him, during their long separation, after her visit among his people, but it was done with an air, a tone, a quality of recollection as though she were speaking of a third person. The minister found himself in the attitude of an old friend, yet held at arm's length.

She volunteered a mass of information concerning Nicholas and Peter, Catherwood, meanwhile, regarding her with a sharp scrutiny. Had mere propinquity, then, done its sad business with a woman like this? What degree of success, of prosperity, on the part of Vroom could level the difference between him and her? for he perceived a certain personal interest in her talk of Peter; and, after all, Nicholas Storm might just as well have inspired her with a warmer regard. It argued nothing, because a woman spoke indifferently of a man as Susanna did of Nicholas. Years ago, Catherwood had perceived elements of strength in that rude Dutch lad, and these might have led to a fine development. All he gathered was, that Nicholas had won a prize and was, in consequence, an instructor at Columbia; that he had undergone great privations in the way of food and shelter while acquiring his education, as his father had never aided him; and that while still a tremendous worker and very successful, his health was broken and his physician had declared a long rest to be imperative.

Catherwood gradually became conscious that, although Susanna was affable, sympathetic, and companionable to an extreme degree, she was estimating his quality, his fibre, with a temperateness, a deliberation, which he found himself, for want of a better term, calling masculine. He had finished this process with her long ago and passed final judgment, but it had never occurred to

him that she might think it necessary to review her childish admirations and renew or set them aside as the case might be. The perception disconcerted him, made him silent. He became lost in thought, finally, and, with his eyes cast down, sat very erect in a chair whose high, straight, mitred back aided his clerical garments in giving him an extremely ecclesiastical aspect.

When he looked up, it was to observe her slightly bent forward, her large blue-gray eyes lighting with a kind of unwilling warmth of acquiescence.

A shrewd, provocative smile illuminated his features. "Have I passed muster?"

She leaned back and laughed—a happy, delicious ripple of amusement. "Yes, but with conditions."

"What are they?"

"Oh, you will find out soon enough. Perhaps I shall discover equivalents, although, at present, the conditions stand."

"Is this the result of the college education?"

"There it is again," she exclaimed, with a touch of displeasure.

"Surely I said nothing uncomplimentary."

"Truly, no, but your tone; it was the universal tone, the precise accent, which makes my poor college in every instance a scapegoat for what people do not admire in me. I was perfectly frank with you when I said conditions. I meant conditions. But when you imply you do not find me retaining the uncritical and tremendous ardors of a child, you say 'college education.' I did not think it of you. You made college a possibility to me." Her countenance was full of a proud, indignant protest; her eyes were shining and expanded.

"I wasn't looking for ardors. Why should I expect them?" He fixed a clear, steady gaze upon her. "You had my unqualified esteem five years ago, and I brought it to you undiminished. I forgot that I went away a man, leaving you in many respects unformed. The discovery, notwithstanding my ten years' seniority, that we are at about the same level of perception and judgment took me off my feet, and my question as to the cause was honest and without invidiousness."

"But your acquisitions, Mr. Catherwood, your acquisitions are vastly ahead of mine," she hastened to say,

anxious only to fill a breach she might have made, and aware the next instant of the absurd complacency of her remark.

"Possibly," a furtive smile hovering about his lips, followed quickly by another smile ingenuously humorous. "I may have to reef my sails here also. It takes a great deal of time to learn a very little, and half of what I so laboriously stored away twenty years ago has proved worthless. Take Egyptian and Babylonian antiquities, for instance. I have read about everything on those subjects, but each year my table of dates has to be modified."

"Law would be more satisfactory, I should think. Next to mathematics, it takes on the nature of exactness."

He shook his head. "Law, as well as almost everything else in these days, has to be evolutionary. In its essential principles it implies barbarism—the rudiments. I tried law to clear my brain during some of the long winters in Whirlpool, where one could not go about much. I took my degree and then began a course in medicine. There I find a fascinating subject; it seems to put one on the plane of the discoverer. The study of the interblending of physical and psychological causes and their resultants has modified my entire mode of thinking. It has changed some of my conceptions of God, and opened up a new train of ideas concerning human accountability."

She leaned back on the sofa where she was sitting. Catherwood, as a minister, might, after all, prove interesting. "You will have to be very careful about your beliefs at the Calvin Memorial," she said softly.

"It is my turn now. Would you imply a minister needs cramp his influence by wearing a mental and moral strait-jacket?"

"I did not imply; I made the statement."

"Well, then, I make the statement that I shall not have to be more careful at the Calvin Memorial than elsewhere."

"Ah, you have enlarged the premise and spoiled the argument as it stood. We can't go on."

A gleam of admiration and respect shot over his face.

Sorry, out of mere politeness, to have appeared to seek an advantage, she hastened to set it aside, and

added, with friendly earnestness: "We are so concerned, grandmamma and I, for your success, Mr. Catherwood. You have come among a tough, ultra-orthodox, and awfully conservative set."

His figure lost a certain rigid, though not unbecoming, dignity, as if he felt the comfort of sympathy.

"This is very kind of you—very kind, indeed; but success is not the question, Susanna. Let the success rest with God. The question is, Shall I have the power to speak truth and teach the love of God?"

He had avoided calling her by her name before, and, unconsciously, uttered it with a tender, falling accent.

As if the downright announcement of his purpose and hope struck some fetter loose which had hitherto chained him, he drew a long, free breath. His deep-set, luminous eyes shone with that fervor which, if not the cause and meaning of a call, sets a man aside, if he is true to himself, as a teacher in spiritual matters.

He rose to leave shortly after, and Susanna invited him to take tea the following Sunday.

This he promised to do, provided his evening sermon were fully prepared.

"Why can't you spend Saturday and Sunday here? You shall have all the leisure and solitude you need. Will you come?" she urged.

A glow lighted up his whole face.

"Yes," he replied, after a moment's pause.

When he had gone, she went up to her room. Taking the red Bible, she looked at her name in faded ink on the fly-leaf, and, for the first time in years, read the passages he had marked for her before placing the volume in her little hands as his parting gift.

CHAPTER IV

THE atmosphere of Catherwood's personality was of a kind from which Susanna did not readily emerge.

People pleased her who gave her shocks of feeling or stimulated her thought, provided they served as batteries to start a motor she fancied entirely her own; but there was that about Catherwood's influence which impressed her with a weird sense of amorphousness, as if his point of view became hers, notwithstanding intention and belief to the contrary. In her case, as in that of others whose conduct of life is largely the resultant of processes of thought, instinct and intuition were often hampered, and she failed to understand when a crisis was imminent.

Her memory had invested the minister with a glamour of heroic physical proportions and beauty. On meeting him, she saw at once to what an extent she had been romancing, and this perception armed her with a critical scrutiny, leaving her all the more vulnerable to forces neither external nor instantly powerful except with men and women of high nervous endowment and culture.

His career, thus far, had proved him to have some kind of force working its way to opportunities, not the portion of the majority, with the steady advance of an artesian bore. He had achieved no brilliant success, but he had made no mistakes. He had taken no backward step.

Susanna was constantly asking herself during that first visit whether it was because his ability was fortified by prudence and the shrewd worldly wisdom of his generation, or whether, though able to use these means, his chief talent lay in a power to perceive new issues, and a strength of volition and character to commit himself to his perceptions with ardor. If he were a man of enthusiasms, of radical tendencies, and with that quality of

spiritual heroism which, while it possesses a man, renders him absolutely regardless of consequences, she believed he would find he had made his first profound and perhaps fatal mistake in accepting the call to the Calvin Memorial.

If he fell out with such a church, he might never come forth from the shadow it would throw over his reputation; and, if he remained, waxing still more famous, she fancied she would have to set him aside in her thought as one of her fallen idols. That there was any middle ground on which a man of his apparently extensive learning and spirituality could meet the smug belief and methods in charitable work, the wintry prayer-meetings, and heavy services, never entered her mind; and, if it had, she would have set it aside as absurd.

She sat by the window in her chamber, staring out over the cheerless stretch of yards and weather-worn brick façades which the rear view offered. The patches of withered grass in the squares of stone flagging showed meagre and frozen. The cooks and laundresses passing in and out of the dark basement kitchens, their brawny arms red with the cold, their heads frowled, added a sordid and barren aspect to the dreary picture. But, although she saw all this, it did not engage her thought; for it was like the faintly noticed landscape at the back of a painted portrait. Catherwood was painted on her memory in vivid, though sombre, colors. She saw the tall, spare figure as he lingered at the door. His clean-shaven face, his deep-set, serious, penetrating eyes, his firm, straight, full lips, dropping into curves only when he smiled, his powerful chin, sharply defined and accentuating the lines already etching into prominence his strong nose with its breadth of nostril, the gray showing in his dark, fine, waving hair, thinning about the temples and exposing a straight, square forehead of unusual depth — such a face did not make for good looks. It might have belonged to one of the early begging friars or Oxford Methodists. There was something about the whole stamp of the man which set him apart. The effect had been tremendously enforced upon her because his talk showed an utter unconsciousness of the fact.

She fidgeted in her chair. A deep furrow cut itself into her beautiful forehead. "He has a powerful per-

sonality, but he will never conquer that church — never! He will have to break with it sooner or later."

"What are you talking about?" said Mrs. Dutton, in surprise, on pushing the door open and finding her alone.

"Oh, I suppose I was thinking aloud about Mr. Catherwood. He has been here."

"Has he?" exclaimed the old lady, eagerly. "Did you ask him to stay to dinner?"

"Why, no! I did not think in time, or I would have done so. But he is coming to spend Saturday and Sunday."

"Oh, dear, I am so disappointed not to see him to-day. I felt, all the time I was gone, that I was losing something. How did he look?"

She set her lips thoughtfully. "If you mean, grandmamma, his health, I should say he looked well. But he is very thin, and tall, and pale — with a big nose, and a wide mouth, and a fine smile — and the air of Luther when he said, 'I cannot do otherwise.' I should say he might be something of a martinet."

"What a picture! Weren't you pleased with him?" she inquired anxiously. "The sun rose and set with him when you were a child."

"My horizon is wider now. Oh, yes, I liked him. I think he may be a really great man; he gives me that impression. It remains to be seen, though, whether he is great," she added, in haste to qualify her praise. "The cottonwood is a big tree, but it makes poor timber."

"O my dear! I would like to hear you for one single day talk like other girls. Do say a person is horrid, or ugly, or elegant. Your distinctions take the heart out of me. It would have warmed me through and through to hear you say: 'He's just splendid' — for he is!" and the old lady turned with sudden vigor and fire.

"If you say so, he is," replied Susanna, laughing. "You would like to have me adore him, I do believe, grandmamma. Well, if I can, I will; but if I can't, why, I can't. Come, come to your room and let me take off your wraps. You look fairly blue with the cold. You must have a cup of tea." She rang a bell.

Mrs. Dutton yielded to these entreaties with that

docility which only the mesmerism of affection can produce in the aged. When the tea had refreshed her, and her wrinkled hands had become white and delicate under the girl's chafing, she looked up from the depths of her armchair with a coaxing, childlike curiosity. "Now begin at the beginning and tell me everything he said. I can't get over the disappointment of not seeing him."

When, at length, the subject had been exhausted, Susanna went to her room to dress for dinner.

The amenities of her position at this moment were of immense importance to her. A democrat in principle, she was a princess at heart.

She had already begun to build a corner in her library growing out of the traditions and histories revealed in the letters which the secretary contained. There were illustrated works on the castles of England and the continent; there were books of heraldry; there were biographies of statesmen, nobles, and beauties however remotely related to her as collaterals; some of these books she had annotated to a voluminous extent. There was a section devoted to Colonial and Revolutionary times, although in records of these periods she had thus far made slow progress, owing to the difficulty in obtaining access to early American history. Conspicuous in this section were a New England Primer and an Old English Reader, the fly-leaf of the first containing her great-grandfather's name and that of the second her grandmother's. She had begun also to hoard daguerrotypes and collect miniatures, a task comparatively easy and inexpensive at a time when most Americans would have been loath to boast of an interest in genealogy or a belief in heredity.

Even Mrs. Dutton had little idea of the girl's rigid standards, or she would have felt at ease concerning Peter Vroom.

Shortly before dinner, and while Mrs. Dutton, supported by her granddaughter's arm, was descending the long, slippery stairs, the door-bell rang.

The butler admitted Nicholas Storm.

The night was bitter and dark. An east wind was driving a mist colder than snow in from the ocean. The rattle of the heavy stages on the avenues sounded through the open door with a muffled, jarring rumble. A wintry

blast whistled through the hall. Nicholas himself seemed for an instant enveloped in fog.

He stared up the staircase, half blinded by the brilliant light. It seemed to him he had never beheld a more splendid sight than Susanna as she appeared at that moment. Her elevation served to give him a remote and sickening feeling of her inaccessibility, while all the time he realized that she was smiling and welcoming him with each step of her descent.

Mrs. Dutton, having greeted him, hastened out of the draft.

"This is like old times," said Susanna, with the effusiveness of genuine delight. "You will dine with us, surely."

He glanced at her with something of the mute expression of thanks observable in a neglected dog on receiving unwonted kindness, tugging, meanwhile, with a final wrench at his overcoat. "To tell the truth, it is why I came, at least if I should have the good luck to find Mrs. Dutton and you alone."

"How thin you are, Nick! If you weren't so tall, you would be invisible. What are you doing to yourself?"

"Oh, I am all right. I have been overworking, that is all. I am going to take a vacation. I am going home to-morrow."

She gave him a surprised stare.

"You wonder what for, don't you? I did not think I should ever go back after mother died and was buried, and no word sent to me. But I have changed my mind. It is the only thing for me to do," he added, as they walked towards the library. "Saskia married old Vroom last week. I guess it will be as much news to Peter as it was to me. They have joined the farms at last. That ought to have made father happy. But it seems it hasn't. He wants the line on the turnpike unbroken also. He goes up to your place and measures and plans until the quarter of a mile stretch you have along the road seems worth its weight in gold to him. I believe he would give you almost any price for it to-day. Still, if it were not that, it would be something else. There is a strain of insane discontent and greed in our blood. It took the form of miserly hoarding with father, long ago. Caty Ann Van Voorhies wrote me last Mon-

day. She said the neighbors were beginning to talk about him. He has grown so sullen and moping. He is all alone in the old house. He won't have anybody stay with him."

"I should think it was Saskia's place to look after him," said Susanna, with a tremulous irritation of voice that made the young man regard her with a brief but longing inquiry, as if he would read some personal element in her sympathy. "Saskia always used to manage him."

"I judge he is beyond even Saskia's influence from Caty Ann's letter. At all events, she can't be in two places at once, and Mr. Vroom, too, is well along in years."

"Nicholas," said Susanna, tenderly, laying her hand on his arm, "promise me you won't stay there any length of time. If you will not admit you are ill, others see it. You owe a duty to yourself. Do what you can up there in two or three days, and then start south. You will ruin your future if you do not make your health your first care for the next few months."

A kind of rested smile lighted up his gaunt, strong features. He regarded her gratefully. He drew a long, thoughtful breath. It was evident, notwithstanding his powerful frame, his big, homely, sinewy hands, that somewhere his strength was sapped. A grim illumination of resolve gave his face a rugged grandeur. "How can one tell what duty is beyond to-day. I can't. Father is mine at this minute. Oh, yes," he added, as if answering her inevitable thought, "I am ambitious — at least, I have some ambition in the line of my profession. I have had a thought that I might do something for the world, in a small way, as a biologist. I had another ambition — but I have about given it up. Perhaps, if I told it to you, you would think it monstrous." His honest Dutch blue eyes, with their capacity for candor and gentleness, became intense.

She turned her head and sighed faintly, and though her attitude was sympathetic, there was a deprecating negation about it, which he understood.

He straightened his shoulders, as if shaking off a powerful temptation. His face sharpened, dominated by some fine, high resolve.

"I have been having a battle with myself, lately, over this other ambition," he continued in a persistent tone, as though forcing the gate shut upon a thrilling vision. "I have come, in spite of myself, notwithstanding the ablest reasoning on my own part in my own behalf, to consider it absurd, sinful. But I don't seem able—yet—in my secret soul, to stick to my resolve. The redemption of humanity rests upon self-denial by those born with some vital infirmity. And so, Susanna," he folded his arms across his breast, drawing himself to his full height, the great breadth of his shoulders apparent for a second before they fell, as though from a sudden, poignant fatigue, "and so I have taken a vow against those natural cravings for a home and all it means."

She took his hands, pressing them gently.

"How good and strong and brave you are, Nicholas!"

A loud ringing sounded in his ears. An overwhelming sense of her nearness, a flooding memory of the touch of her little hand in his when she was a child, made him turn white and rigid.

Perceiving the cruel blunder she had committed, she withdrew her hands and began to lead the way to the dining-room, making the approach as slow as possible.

"I thought you were never coming," said Mrs. Dutton. "I was just about to send Miles in search of you. It wasn't kind, dear, to keep Nicholas waiting. I wish I had the care of you for a month, Nicholas. I guess I could give you back some of your strength and vigor. If you don't get better soon, you must come here and let me nurse you. I am a first-rate nurse, and I am not so old and feeble yet, as to have lost my skill."

"You only need look at me, Nick, for a proof of what grandmamma says."

He had regained his self-command, and he let his glance rest for a moment on her, as if she were a heavenly landscape opening to his view.

Her eyes fell under a subtle appreciation of the extent of the integrity of his intention to hold even his thought and sensation aloof from the coldest indulgence of pleasure in her as a woman, since, under the most abstract possible conception, he would be sure to feel the temptation of the love which she knew had never wavered since the night when she saw him under the oak battling alone

in an agony of feeling over her. She held him to be that rarest of men, — a man to whom the love of woman has meant, and always would mean, one woman, and the woman of his first and only possible choice.

The conversation ran along on commonplace levels during dinner, but Susanna maintained a sprightly tone. When, however, they had withdrawn to the library, she coaxed Nicholas into a description of a work on ethnology he had well under way.

Mrs. Dutton listened with an amiable and exasperating acquiescence, apparently feeling no responsibility concerning advanced views outside of her own family. She fell asleep with the most perfect equanimity while he was dilating on the possible existence of man in the world in the Pleiocene as well as in the Pleistocene period, and was gently snoring when he was summing up with great enthusiasm his arguments in proof of an antiquity dating back, at least, one hundred thousand years.

"If I had made such a statement as that — if I had," and Susanna clasped her hands in mock despair, "it would have been used as shining proof of the demoralizing influence of a college education for women."

"Never mind," said Nicholas, as if another phase of his researches presented itself; "when you think how long this thing has been going on, this matter of being born and dying, and how long it has taken to evolve so little — it hardly seems worth while to let any one or anything fret us. I feel at times a perfect mental and moral stagnation. Just as soon as I let the extension of a thought possess me with its scope, or its intension impress me with the minutiae of detail, I am lost in bewilderment. There is a certain amount of truth in the fact that Philistinism and the various conservative virtues of that great middle element who know a little of everything and not much of anything, but are cock-sure they know everything worth knowing, are the salt of the work-a-day world and keep us theorists sane when our wits would otherwise get addled. There is Peter Vroom. He doesn't know one iota outside of what he sees. A creature of sense, he is fitted to his environment. Peter is a happy man."

"Yes." Susanna smiled. "He was taken into the firm the other day. He is now part of the company

whose name stands in such splendid gilt letters on so many corners of the avenues far east and west, and is encountered at every turn near the ferries. I wonder how he feels when he sees it, as he rides past those slat doors under which one catches a glimpse of feet, but above which one never sees a face. Peter is very proud over the bigness of the gas bill the firm has to meet to keep those mysteries well lighted."

Nicholas nodded. After a pause, he said, "When Peter sees his name in such places, he feels still happier."

They both laughed in spite of themselves, and Susanna presently went to the window and drew aside the curtain.

The wind had veered to the north and the fog had cleared. The stars shone in brilliant profusion against the dark, wintry sky.

She turned with a quick resolve.

"I have a mind to ask you to do something. I have not been out of the house to-day. Mr. Catherwood was here this afternoon. He invited me to come and see his study. It is in a wing of the church. Would you be willing to take me there for a walk, now?"

He assented eagerly.

Their way lay up Fifth Avenue, even then a splendid thoroughfare. Its monotonous brown stone dwellings glimmered imposingly in the moonlight, their gloom heightened by the faint illumination visible within, their heavy cornices and deep-set doors and lofty stoops suggesting gigantic monuments of the dead. The stages, packed with well-dressed men and women on their way to places of amusement, rattled and careened over the cobblestones with a hurly-burly of noise. Piles of snow and accumulated filth outlined the pavements. A motley swarm of rich and poor touched shoulders and disappeared in the near darkness, leaving a momentary gap in the endless procession, to be almost instantly filled by another crowd of vanishing souls. Above, like the vault of some cathedral, star-spangled, curved the dark sapphire of the sky, tranquilly brilliant. Near the summit of one of the slight elevations still indicating, though faintly, the original hilly topography of Manhattan, they turned down a side street and rang the bell of a narrow door admitting to a wing of the Calvin Memorial.

Catherwood answered the summons, pleasantly surprised to see Susanna so soon. It took him a moment to recall Nicholas, and then the whole troop of associations returned. To cover his forgetfulness, he began mentioning this incident and that connected with Storm's boyhood, thrusting into the midst of his reminiscences introductions to a man of his own years, whose expression of disappointment subsided into one of curiosity and admiration as Miss Kildare came forward.

The study seemed to have but one redeeming feature—a grate which was filled with soft coal freshly ignited. The mass of brilliant flame shed a cheerful glow over everything.

There was a general effort at desultory conversation not very satisfactory at first.

Feeling a restraint creeping over her which she was determined to repress, Susanna walked about the room, examining it with a feminine interest in detail, aware, at the same time, that her presence accentuated Catherwood's cheerfulness, although, acceding to her request to do so, he had let her wander about alone.

Presently, having the satisfaction of perceiving that the conversation which the call had interrupted had been resumed, and with a resolute intention to play the part of listener, she took the chair waiting for her at one corner of the little group gathered in a wide circle before the fire.

Her observation had been acute enough to let her know that the passionless candor of argument among men seemed to be an almost unattainable virtue with her sex. She was constantly trying to learn the secret of it as well as its complement, an assurance that nothing personal could possibly be lurking in a radical difference of opinion, and that serious objection to one point of view, or one line of conduct, did not involve an objection to every point of view, or the necessity of throwing an otherwise desirable acquaintance overboard.

As the men went on talking, with a genial laugh now and then at their own expense, after laboriously and unexpectedly reaching an absurdity through a chain of apparently faultless reasoning, she recalled the committee meetings of the alumnae of the college and the honest, but usually futile, efforts of the girls to maintain

a neutral expression and a tranquil, monotonous tone of voice in discussing motions. It was all so constrained and restrained; the speakers seemed masquerading. Woman's emotional nature — of a very volatile quality, notwithstanding a four years' curriculum covering disciplinary need and much training in generalization — proved too much for repression in almost every case.

Was it because of a radical feminine characteristic? Or, did she and the other "girls" have so few practical opportunities of seeing life outside of its social aspect, that this aspect colored whatever they did and said when they tried to express themselves under parliamentary conditions? Was it because their domestic training was more or less in the line of agreement imposed on Katherine by Petruchio?

The talk had been on the subject of inheritance, and Hillerton was saying that as society evolved, descent and inheritance reverted from the maternal to the paternal side; that, consequently, there was, if not a divine fitness in the present order, at least the fitness of civilization, in making the man the head of the house, the holder of property, the lawmaker, the priest.

"But civilization, if the term has any meaning, implies progression. The present status of things, the present relation of the sexes, amounts to nothing pro or con as a finality — say two hundred years hence, even." Catherwood's arm was thrown over the back of his chair. There was a gleam of lofty hope in his expression.

"We are in the lowest stages of civilization, if we are anywhere," said Nicholas, thoughtfully. "It may prove to be the case, if we ever attain to a universal humane condition, the approach to which of course will be through international arbitration, — such a condition as More framed in his 'Utopia,' — that we shall return to some elementary principles, — such as *mutterrecht*, mother right, — because they are fundamental. But we cannot tell anything about it now. We are too low in the intellectual scale. Our most profound deductions and inductions avail us little concerning the social order. Our social order has been chiefly an experience growing out of necessity. No people has yet been able to deduce a science out of which could symmetrically develop an art of life. Our accurate knowledge applies mostly to

matter. The triumph of man thus far is the triumph over matter. Theocracy, Platonism, Christianity, vital as we conceive them to be, have been infinitesimal in their influence, and that influence has rested on the brute force in man applied to conquest. The world has necessarily thus far been a man's world. The tremendous pressure of circumstances, the bitter fight through centuries, has made the male animal aggressive, cruel, selfish. A man has been of value among his fellows according to the measure of actual brute force he has represented. It shows in the very structure of laws relating to the sexes. Whenever, considered as our property, the woman needed the protection of law, the tribe, the clan, the nation made that law. But where, on all the statute-books of all the centuries, is there a single law to protect her against us as individuals, provided our common, selfish interests as men have not been interfered with? Even the advance we have appeared to make in conceding them property rights has a reversionary benefit for us in our bankrupt laws. Men have not been particularly culpable in all this; it has simply been in the order of advance from barbarism. For the final advance, women will have to assert themselves. I confess the time seems remote when they will have the environment, the courage, the unification, or the knowledge to do it—but do it they will."

Hillerton laughed good-naturedly. He was a big, strong, sharp-featured, but handsome man, with a shrewd expression, an air of authority, and a not disagreeable complacency of manner. "Well, all I say is, the Lord deliver me from such a revolution. Don't you say so, Miss Kildare?"

"I don't know whether I do or not."

Catherwood glanced briefly at her, as if rather pleased with her reply. Hillerton's expression became keen, but it relaxed, and he added with a gentle urbanity, very effective: "I presume the subject is too technical, too abstract, to engage your attention either way. I noticed your interest in the contents of this study—a truly feminine trait. Now a man, the ordinary man, would have taken in the room as a whole."

She smiled. There was a subtle droop of her eyelids. "The proportions are all wrong," she said reflectively.

Hillerton observed a dimple come and go in her cheek.

When Susanna looked up, encountering his gaze, her own exhibited a sudden and haughty expansion. He realized the magnificence of her beauty. Who was she?

There was some further talk about the church, of which it appeared Hillerton was an elder. Susanna remarked that her grandmother wished to take a pew in the Calvin Memorial, and Nicholas promised to come every Sunday to hear Catherwood, and then Hillerton left.

The trio soon became reminiscent, the minister gliding into the teacher and friend in one. Very dexterously he led Nicholas to pour out the story of years of privation, ambition, and consequent success crippled by ill health, while Susanna, with a swelling heart, realized that, at last, some one beside herself was ready to feel anxiety over the tense, brilliant, glassy look in those candid blue eyes and take a practical interest in the welfare of the solitary man.

The hollows in his cheeks deepened and flushed as Nicholas talked on. When he smiled, there were parchment-like wrinkles along the lines between his nose and chin. But the energy of a will continually at work under adverse conditions was in his tone, his nervous quickness of thought and speech. He appeared like an engine in perfect order, but fired to run beyond the gauge of those tests and limits his capacity indicated. As Catherwood observed this, he asked himself in alarm, "How long can it last?"

The clock in the steeple struck ten. Susanna rose.

When the door closed on his guests, the minister climbed like a boy into one of his windows, and watched them disappear around the corner out of sight.

CHAPTER V

A DROP in the temperature overnight made Nicholas hesitate about undertaking the journey. But this indecision was brief, for his father's condition loomed before him more and more portentously.

Towards noon he took a train north, alighting at the station nearest Klacs just as the sun was touching the summit of the Catskills.

A glare of cold yellow light flamed like an aureole along the flowing curve of their snowy tops, the radiance illuminating their white sides with the hard lustre of satin.

The sun set; the radiance faded; the yellow changed to orange above which emerged a band of delicate, icy green; beyond stretched the blue sky, as brittle to the sight as glass. There was no wind. The air was dry and pure. The cold was intense but exhilarating.

With the secretiveness attendant on adverse circumstances and that gripping loneliness clutching the heart of one who has become an alien in his home, a sudden determination seized the young man to return as unnoticed as he had departed.

Making his way through by-paths from which he now seemed never to have been absent, and occasionally stopping to regain his breath, for the dry, keen air choked, he came out on the main road.

The mountains glimmered like gigantic lamps of alabaster filled with moonlight. The stars crowded one another in bewildering number and brilliancy, their golden feet twinkling and disappearing upon the dark blue pavement of the sky. The farm-houses looked hauntingly familiar, their capacious roofs and low stone walls giving them the appearance of motherly hens sheltering a brood of chickens. As he passed one after another, he recalled the interiors, surprising himself with

the minutiae of a memory for those details which his boyhood had accumulated, when already he was beginning to be troubled with the scholar's infirmity in seeking to discover what it can throw overboard and how little retain, trusting to books for facts, in order to leave as large a space as possible within the boundaries of the brain for thought. A query darted into his mind as to the date of Cuvier's birth; this he could not recall, yet, all the time, the fact that there was a moon on the face of Caty Ann's clock, and a rocking ship on Joris Vroom's, that the widow Dutton's had pinnacles, and his mother's a tiny flaw under the figure 5, kept recurring with such vigor that, finally, in a fit of exasperation, while trying to banish the clocks, he simply changed the order; like a detachment of soldiers, those clocks seemed to walk beside him—the moon leering, the ship dancing, the pinnacles tottering, and the flaw and the 5 advancing and retreating as if opposites in a Virginia reel.

He reached the last bend in the road he knew so well, of which the outcropping ledges were now billowy and white. The sweet fern on either side, tufted with snow, showed withered, and he missed the ethereal fragrance by which he always associated it with Susanna, because, just beyond this spot, he had paused so often to gaze at her attic window, where, years ago, he had so frequently seen her, her little round arms doubled on the sill, her red frock showing, and a dash of white in a rim of darkness telling him where the dear face was.

But now the low moan in a cluster of pines murmured, "Gone! gone!"

The even stretch of snow made his own home seem close at hand, and the old gray house much nearer than it was. The gable of the Dutton homestead stood up high and barren above the little dooryard, looking from that distance like an unbroken rift. The moonlight struck the small panes of glass, and they glittered with a cold, unmeaning stare. Putting his bag on the ground, he struck his hands together to start a glow. He felt mortally cold. His energy was reacting. Pretty soon he started on again, coming at length to a picket gate swung low between the two sides of a broad stone wall, and admitting to his own fields.

A narrow path had been trodden through the snow, so

deep that his coat brushed it as he walked on. He reached the hickories, their great height and lofty branches forming but a slight barrier to the moonlight.

The path ran straight to the kitchen door, and had evidently been made by but one pair of feet. Not a light was to be seen along the entire front of the capacious house, its three doors looking as though they had not been unfastened in years.

Setting his bag down on the flagging, he tried the kitchen door and found it locked and barred.

He cast a hurried glance around. The deep snow exhibited no trace of having been broken outside the tiny path. There was another door at the rear of the kitchen; he must try that.

He plunged into the snow, sinking up to his knees.

To his surprise, the back door yielded to his touch, and he went in. The paper shades were down and the darkness was intense. Groping his way to where the match-box had always stood, he found it, and striking a light, beheld a sorry picture. For a brief moment, he forgot his father, so astonished was he at the sight of dirt, untidiness, and general confusion. An overwhelming sense of his mother's death swept over him. He brushed the tears aside.

The bed in the recess, always such a monument of comfort and whiteness, was tumbled and grimy. The huge stove was burnt gray, and cracked in every direction. Bits of food lay on the floor, and the chimney of a kerosene lamp showed half lined with soot.

Where was his father? Had he grown too lonesome, after all, and sought Saskia? He could hardly believe it. No; there was his pipe partially filled, on the table. He picked it up and examined it, but it gave no clue.

He now started on a tour through the house; evidently the other rooms had not been used recently. They were exactly the same as when he went away years ago. The big beds looked white and ghostly. Their canopies appeared hideous. A damp, musty smell pervaded everything. He mechanically opened a drawer in a high mahogany bureau where he knew his mother kept her treasures, some vague hope of a message from her prompting the act. Saskia's hand had evidently been here, for the scanty stock of garments his mother

had left had been placed in this bureau. He turned over the plain, old-fashioned clothes. How few they were! How homely they looked! He came upon an old plaid shawl — one he had seen her throw around her shoulders in her journeys to and from the barn. He buried his face in it, sobbing aloud. Then, reverently folding it, he was about to put it back, when he saw a box. He opened it, and there were his letters to her, and a photograph he had sent her the year after he had gone away. He had never heard whether they had been received; he had known too well the bondage she was under, soul and body, to dare expect a reply. He shut the drawer, greatly comforted over this slight evidence that she had cherished his memory. A soft feeling was tugging at his heart towards Saskia, because she had spared the box.

But where was his father?

He returned to the kitchen. He opened the rear door, examining the snow. There was another narrow path leading towards the barns. A sudden fear, born of ugly family traditions and a poignant memory connected with childhood, smote him. He caught his breath. How the keen air cut his throat! He idly wondered how many degrees below zero the mercury was. He lighted an ancient lantern he found hanging on its accustomed peg.

Striking into the thread of a path, he hurried along, noting the clouds of frosty steam his breathing made, and feeling his nostrils closing with the cold.

The great barn, facing east and west, stood in the centre of an extensive group of outbuildings, and its deep red surface glowed menacingly in the moonlight.

As he drew near, he noticed that the heavy doors were ajar. A strange, premonitory thrill stole over him, as, setting the lantern down in the snow, he swung one of the leaves aside, letting in a flood of moonlight over the wide, middle aisle, flanked on either side by hay packed to the ceiling. In the centre had dangled a rope suspended by a pulley from the ridge-pole. How many shocks of wheat and bushels of corn he had raised and lowered by that very rope! He knew it must be there, but, as he opened the door and fastened it back, outside, he would not let himself look. He opened the other

half of the door in the same manner, his face resolutely turned towards the grim stone homestead.

Then, picking up the lantern mechanically and drawing a deep breath, he turned towards that interior.

The jar caused by swinging the doors open and fastening them back had set the long rope in motion like a pendulum. This the young man realized, before letting his eyes rest on the heavy weight he saw without seeing. Now, with a mighty effort, he looked squarely at that black, bulky thing swaying with a rotary motion back and forth.

The lantern fell from his hand, the glass shivering to pieces as it struck the floor. But the light was unnecessary, for the moon was low, and its hard, staring face filled that long, wide aisle with a wintry, searching light, bringing the hoary, distorted features of the farmer into bold relief. The protruding, half-open eyes, the shaggy brows, the projecting, ragged teeth, showed horribly distinct, terribly real.

Nicholas rubbed his sleeve across his eyes, gasping with a choking dryness of the throat, and looked again. He felt the strange, shrinking dread of one who has dreamed a gruesome thing over and over and at last finds it a fact. Perhaps he had dreamed once more, and it was not true. He stared at the lofts of hay, at the roof, noticing the musty smell of a barn well stored. The appealing whinny of a horse caught his ear.

It was no dream. He was awake. He had come home, after many years, to face the catastrophe which had pointed with menacing finger at three successive generations. It would be his turn next — his! He might put it off a little longer, he might vary the expression of this taint in his blood — overcome it, he couldn't. A benumbing, unspeakable, despairing horror seized him. Gain or loss; these were the work of centuries. This devolution from higher to lower, this degeneration along the line of ascent, was the inevitable concomitant of wrong living, wrong thinking, marking the track with a ruin worse than the original, healthy savagery from which a race emerges. And he was on the downward track. He came of a blighted stock. It was only a question of time and he, also, would do some abnormal thing; he, too, by his own act, by the law of his perverted being,

would put himself outside the pale. Such thoughts as these flashed through his mind in one brief instant; rather, they were one of those summaries of experience which a man analyzes long after, but which makes immediate action efficacious and otherwise unaccountable.

A profound, pitying tenderness swept over his soul. His horror and fear departed. He became like one of those priests who consecrate their lives to the care of lepers. He had entered, mind and heart, into the moral leprosy which had afflicted his father as far back as he could remember. While his own light still shone, he would use it beneficently.

Poor, sordid, groping spirit, he kept saying to himself, while all the time he was dexterously lowering the body till it reached the floor.

When this was accomplished and the rope cut, he tried to straighten the contorted limbs into some semblance of peace. But they were rigid with the stiffness of death and cold.

He judged his father must have swung there two days, and this realization stirred a bitterness of indignation towards Saskia. Oh, what a hard heart was there! And now again he shrank back upon himself. Something was wrong with them all. Of what use to judge Saskia either?

He hauled down a quantity of hay, making an even, soft bed, upon which he dragged the heavy form with great difficulty. He found a buffalo-robe, after some searching, and covered the dreadful spectacle from sight.

By this time, the moon had set, but the clear sky, the multitude of stars, and the snowy landscape afforded sufficient light for him to make his way back to the house. Here he built a fire, found another lantern, and returned to the barns to look after the cattle. A blessed sense of helpfulness in the midst of his general desolation stole over him as he received the expressive welcome of the suffering beasts. Evidently they had been a long time without food or drink. When everything had been attended to, it was past midnight.

He was now no longer conscious of either cold or fatigue, and he felt surprised, in a dim kind of a way, as he perceived himself swaying from side to side, as he walked.

Inside the kitchen once more, he found the stove red-hot, and the genial warmth very grateful. He drew up his mother's old high-back rocker before the fire and sat down. A heavy torpor almost instantly beset mind and body. His head sank forward; his shoulders fell in a tired, huddled heap. The lantern continued to burn on the table.

When he awoke, he drew himself up with a start. The daylight was creeping in through the cracks left by the paper shades. The lantern had burned out. The fire was low. The room was bitterly cold. A slow, spreading chill benumbed every portion of his body as he began to move about. He drew up the shades.

What a bleak, wintry landscape! He looked up at the mountains—an unbroken, towering mass of white, except where the ragged, black, stony precipices revealed their frowning sides. No smoke issued as of yore from the Dutton chimney. A profound, deathless silence reigned.

With a violent effort, he roused himself to action.

He found only a miser's hoard of food in the cupboards and cellar. After a hasty breakfast, and attending to the cattle, he fastened a horse to the ancient green cutter and drove rapidly down the long lane to the road. The farther he travelled from that huge red barn, the greater the horror there, covered from sight under the buffalo-robe. Once he furtively turned his head and looked back. The sun was rising, and the barn showed like a patch of blood upon the snow. His face took on a gray, shrunken look.

On reaching the highway, he directed his horse towards the Vrooms', idly noticing while passing the Dutton house that a pane of glass was broken in the west window of the parlor. The snow had been blown with such force that it lay like plaster against the clapboards, frozen fast in the bitter weather. The place had the aspect of long untenancy, and he made a kind of lethargic resolve that when he had attended to—this other matter, he would look after the window and see if things generally were all right.

His horse picked its way with difficulty up the steep mountain road, on which the track was scantily broken, and opposite the pasture-lot came to a standstill, stuck

in a drift. The gigantic pines sighed and moaned and tossed their arms like grief-stricken mothers. The near forest took up the wail with a majestic sound, like that of the ocean before a storm.

Shovelling the horse and cutter free, Nicholas came presently into the shelter of the woods, and where the way proved less obstructed. When the Vroom place appeared in the distance, the smoke issuing from the chimneys lent a little life to the sombreness and solitude of the scene.

As he drove up the lane, on one side of which was the primeval forest, on the other, a broad stretch of cleared land sloping to the east, the baying of a pack of hounds announced his arrival.

He saw Saskia poke her head through the crack of a door. He was near enough to notice the shawl pinned over her ears, and her gaunt, red hand and arm bare to the elbow. The very tilt of her chin bespoke chary hospitality. Evidently she did not recognize him, and instinctively he slackened his rein, approaching slowly. The dogs gathered in a menacing group, growling intermittently and lapsing into howling barks.

"Down there, you brute, down!" putting her foot on the neck of one as the animal crouched. Then she looked up again, and the cutter was near enough for her to scrutinize her brother sharply.

"Land sakes alive, Nick, what are you a-doin' here?" She had not seen him in seven years. She did not come forward as he drew up.

But he held out his hand, before alighting. He had a wild, desperate longing to clutch at something human. At this moment Saskia appealed to him with tremendous force.

"I don't know if I feel like shakin' hands or not," she said, with a forced laugh, half-apologetic, half-fault-finding. "Dey say blood's thicker'n water, but I guess in our case it's hed consid'able thinnin'. But it's cold 'nough to freeze a toad. Git out an' come in right away, or I'll freeze fast." She gave a whoop and cried, "Bill!"

A florid, lumbering man forged around the corner of the house in answer to her call, and Nicholas silently handed him the reins, following her inside with a dull,

stolid wonder over his welcome, over the entire situation in which he found himself, and which kept growing more and more remote to his comprehension.

"Here! set down by the fire." She thrust a chair forward. She did not ask him to remove his coat. He continued to hold his cap in his hands. He tried to speak, but the words stuck in his throat.

As early as it was, all trace of breakfast had vanished.

There was a huge fire of logs on the hearth, and near it a rush-bottom rocker, beside which was a long cotton bag. Over the back of the chair hung a ragged, butter-nut-colored coat.

Saskia sat down in this chair, and, hauling the coat over her knee, began industriously ripping.

"What are you going to make?" Nicholas inquired, idly, his own voice sounding strange to him.

"I ain't a-goin' to make nothin'. I'm a-rippin' up my old man's coat to git pieces fer my new rag carpet. I'm a-doin' it myself, 'cause I can't trust Lize — she's our hired gurl — to pick out the stitches an' put in the rag bag. Rags is bringin' six cents a poun' this winter, an' though stitches ain't heavy weight — still dey do weigh a leetle." She opened the neck of the bag, thrusting inside a dozen molecules of thread with an air of parsimonious virtue. "You wouldn't think it wurth your while, I s'pose, Nick."

He shook his head.

"What's the matter with you?" she now inquired. "Hev you ben a-gittin' in some scrape in York? Hev you come to yer relations fer help?" Her small eyes leered, and a glance of speculative curiosity made her thin face more tense.

"Nothing has happened to me, Saskia — yes — something has, to us."

"Don't you go a-countin' me in none of your affairs. I give you warnin' fair and square. I give you a good chance to keep your part of the pruperty an' you throwed it away, Nicholas Storm; you know you did!" Her voice grew higher. "I always knowed the time'd come when you'd see your folly an' come nosin' 'round to even up t'ings. But it's too late. The will is made. It was made before faather got queer, an' it'll stand the law. You c'n count on that. My man an' Samson

Pickel is zecutors. Dey'll stand by my rights. You don't look, Nick, es though you wanted fer anyt'ing. But I know your kind, I do. I don't b'lieve you've a dollar in the bank, an' I sh'd calc'late you'd a hunderd on your back. Thet's the way it gen'ally is."

"It is your affair!" he exclaimed sternly, intent only on the one solemn fact.

"'Tain't!" she replied crisply, and ripping with vehemence.

"Saskia! — Good God — Saskia! Father has hanged himself!"

The coat dropped from her hand. She turned white. A brief miserly gleam, like the squint of some evil spirit, shot athwart her face and subsided.

"Woll," she said, with emotion mingled of growing terror and exultation, "I knowed it hed to come. He's ben a-threatenin' off an' on this long time. I wish he'd a chuse more season'ble weather." She began to tremble. "How'd you find it out? Who told you?"

"Caty Ann wrote me how bad things were — that you had married a man old enough to be your father — Caty Ann didn't say that; I say it." His voice was stern and cold. "She said that father was alone and acting strangely. I came up the river yesterday afternoon. I walked home. I found father in the barn. He must have been hanging there two days. You must put on your things and go back with me."

As he rose and stood over her, she looked up at him with a sudden, cold suspicion. "How'd you know he's ben a-hangin' there two days?"

He read her evil thought of him with sickening horror.

"Come and see for yourself," he said briefly.

She threw back her head, — her lips tightened. She made a show of walking a little apart from him.

Joris Vroom, stiff with rheumatism, now hobbled out of an adjoining bedroom.

Saskia slapped him on the shoulder as if to rouse his deafened ears to closer attention. "Faather's done it at last!" she shouted.

"Hein?" asked Joris.

"Faather's hanged hisself — in de big red barn! I'm a-goin' back with Nick. Don't he look fine! I'm a-goin' back with Nick to look after things an' lay

faather out. You'll hev de biggist farm in de county, Joris. You won't mind de rheumatiz now, will you?"

His jaws trembled. He tottered as he walked over to his armchair. "Don' you be in too gret a hurry 'bout de pruperty, Saskia. Thet ken wait. O Lord, O Lord!" He sank into his chair, much affected. "Dere won't be none on us left soon. O Lord, O Lord!"

Saskia had bustled out of the room, and Nicholas, stung with a great indignation, walked excitedly up and down.

When she came back, ready for the ride, he led the way outside, put her in the sleigh, and, while she was still fussing and fidgiting and stowing packages here and there, he began to tuck her in in a summary manner. They drove down the mountain road in silence, but when they had reached the bottom, instead of turning towards their former home, he faced towards Klacs.

"Hev you fergot the way?" she asked, breaking the silence for the first time.

"I have not forgotten."

"Where you takin' me?"

"To Klacs."

"What fer?"

"To make my deposition; to summon the doctor, the coroner, the minister, father's friends — if he has any in this wide, wicked world."

"Woll, he ain't got none. I could told you that without all this fuss."

"He has me."

"Oh, you!" She smiled contemptuously, and again they drove on in silence.

By noon, the neighborhood was agog with the news, and the Storm homestead astir with life.

The doctor had sustained Nicholas' verdict; the coroner had pronounced the old farmer's death suicidal. Moreover, calamities of this nature were so common, that the strongest kind of evidence would have been necessary to fasten suspicion on the son, justifiable as many would have considered envy and ill-will on his part.

But Saskia, conscious of the fire her innuendo had set burning in her brother's breast, and chiefly anxious, now, to get him out of the way, began to act as though

the loss were entirely her own and his interest an extraneous and trifling matter—a foolish and hypocritical assumption at the best. She dogged his footsteps. Before night, every closet and drawer throughout the house was locked. Two of the farm hands on the Vroom place were sent for and put in charge of the cattle and horses. Nicholas was ignored. During the one moment when he was giving an order for the cutter to be brought round so that he could go to Klacs to arrange for the digging of the grave and the funeral, she harshly interfered, saying that it was all attended to. But he persisted in going, although, on arriving at the village, it proved to be as she had said. He was continually surprised at her quickness and cleverness under such peculiar conditions.

She had appointed the funeral for the following afternoon. He felt shocked at her despatch.

On his return from Klacs, the bustle about the house had increased. Several women had appeared on the scene, obsequious and flattering in Saskia's presence, but each passing her own comments when they were left alone for a few minutes.

Saskia was a rich woman now, — a very rich woman, — and the spell was working with her neighbors.

Everybody remained up till midnight; for there was much baking and cooking to be done for the funeral feast, Saskia herself mixing the gift cakes, and stamping each with her father's initials, for the guests to take home with them. Fires were lighted in the various rooms, and the big beds remade with fresh linen, for purposes of ornament.

Nicholas had never beheld a scene of such movement and animation in the homestead.

And there lay their father on a couple of planks supported by sawbucks, a coarse sheet covering the rigid, bulky figure, copper pennies weighing down his eyelids, and two young farmers sitting head and foot for watchers, talking over in low tones the suicides of a generation.

This was his home! This was where he had taken root and flourished into manhood! These were surroundings which, according to the natural order of things, he should have found congenial! His soul abhorred it all.

The next day was clear and less cold, and, as the sleighing was fine, the funeral was an opportunity for sensation and pomp. It was a model of its kind. Saskia, heavily draped in mourning, — borrowed for the ceremony, as was the custom, — grieved conspicuously, while not forgetful of the minutest business detail connected with the occasion.

It was nightfall when the party returned from the cemetery. Some of the relatives had come from a distance, a lengthy visit in their plan, but Saskia saw to it that they all departed. No one was left but old Joris Vroom, Nicholas, and herself, as the lonesome winter twilight began to settle everywhere.

They sat around the fire in the kitchen, the other rooms having already been darkened and closed. Saskia was restlessly tapping her foot. She was wondering how soon Nicholas would go back, leaving her unconstrained to the enjoyment of her possessions. He was longing to get away, but there was the formality of the will. He must see it; he must read it.

"We ain't a-goin' to sleep here to-night, Nick," she said tentatively.

"I suppose not," he replied briefly. "But I shall."

She raised her eyebrows, looking at him with sarcastic surprise, her whole manner indicating that he was taking an unwarranted liberty. He understood, but remained silent.

"I don't say, Nick, thet I would refuse you shelter, ef you wus ever in want. You shall never say I wouldn't give you a bed and board till you could help yerself. But, ef you aire a-goin' to stay overnight, now — I didn't know but thet es ev'ryt'ing wus finished, you'd feel es ef you must be a-goin' back right off — ef you aire a-goin' to stay overnight, why, you'd better go home wid us. This ain't no place fer you, an' I ain't — so — tired — but I ken mek up an extry bed in Neeltje's room. Dey say it's full of spooks, but, laws, dey couldn't do more'n skeer you."

"It is in this house, Saskia, the only place where I belong — while here — that I shall stay. There is no train before morning, and, besides, there is the will."

"The will! You know what it says. You knowed that long ago."

Joris Vroom winced, moved restlessly in his chair, and groaned.

She regarded him uneasily. There were depths of kindness in his nature which she feared might prove troublesome.

She got up and lighted a lamp. "Come into the best room an' we'll hev it out," she said, in a tone low enough to escape Joris.

Nicholas followed her into the chamber which he had occupied. To his surprise and indignation, he saw that the bed had been taken apart and everything else dismantled. The room was already bitterly cold.

She placed the lamp on the high mantel, and its light revealed, with pitiless rigor, her florid, mottled cheeks, her scanty, straggling hair, and all the hard, lean contour about her mouth and eyes. Already, her upper lip was seamed by fine perpendicular lines, as if she habitually pursed it.

Nicholas stood at the other end of the mantel. His eyes were brilliant and glassy. There was a look of patience, of resignation about him, but also an expression of stern probity, not without a quieting effect upon Saskia, even at this moment.

"Ef it's the will you aire a-waitin' fer, here it is," and unbuttoning the front of her dress, she drew it forth. "I'll read it to you."

"I must read that will myself."

"That you can't do, Nick; it ken never go out o' my hands till it's probated. You ken look on while I read, though," and she covered the paper as far as she could, in a greedy clutch, with both hands. She began reading aloud.

Item by item, the property, real and personal, was left to her. There was no mention even of a son.

"Dere's father's signatoor—see?" She pointed triumphantly to the farmer's unmistakable chirography. "An' dere's Samson Pickel's an' the l'yyer's. Aire you satisfied now, Nicholas Storm, thet I wus tellin' the truth?"

He stepped away better to confront her.

"I have never doubted one minute, Saskia, that it was all left to you. I knew father as well as you did. But I wanted to see that will and read it for myself. It

was right and proper that I should do so." He drew a long breath. "I wanted to see, also, Saskia, you and I being all who are left—the only two! I wanted to see whether there was any spark of natural affection left in you for me. I am convinced there is not. Do you love anybody, Saskia?"

"We ain't talkin' of love, Nick; we're talkin' business. You see how t'ings is. You see dis farm's mine; thet de house is mine; thet all it holds is mine! I don't want to be hard on you. I don't like the notion, dough, of anybody a-stayin' here when I'm not round. But I'll stretch a p'int. Joris an' me'll go home an' you ken stay overnight, ef you want to. I guess you won't need no fire. Fires is so mussy! I'll mek the bed up an' put on an extry cover. When you go away in the mornin', go out'n de back kitchen door an' hide the key under the aide of de stoop. I'll come down in the arternoon an' straighten up your room an' shet up."

She looked at him with a triumphant, patronizing stare. "I guess thet's all dere is to say." She drew a long, audible yawn.

Nicholas walked over to the other side of the big room and began to draw on his overcoat. Then he sat down and put on his arctics.

His bag and other belongings had already been gathered by some unknown hand into a suggestive pile. He packed the bag.

Saskia remained standing where she was, but watching with evident interest.

When he had finished, and while buttoning his overcoat, he stood looking at her in solemn, speechless wonder.

"You ain't a-goin'!" she said, at length, curiosity and an incipient fear getting the better of her.

"I am going, Saskia, forever!" His head sank on his chest. Recovering himself, he picked up his bag and umbrella, and, without further speech, strode silently from the room, on past Joris Vroom, snoring beside the fire, and out into the bitter night.

CHAPTER VI

CATHERWOOD's first sermon brought the membership together in force. In the long galleries on three sides of the basilica, every seat was occupied. Camp-chairs lined either side of the aisles. There was not a vacant space from the very steps of the pulpit to the fan doors at the rear.

Long before the vast audience had fully gathered, the minister was seated on the crimson velvet sofa behind the pulpit. His black robe intensified the clear ascetic pallor of his complexion. Occasionally, he cast a serious glance over the congregation, but, during the greater part of that interval, his arms were folded across his breast, his head was slightly bowed.

When Mrs. Dutton and Susanna entered, there was a flush of childlike anticipation on the old lady's face. After she was adjusted in her corner, a cushion behind her shoulders, a stool under her feet, she glanced up at the pastor with an expression of mingled reverence and proprietary right. No doubt disturbed her mind as to his fitness for the position which he had been invited to fill.

There were stirrings of emotional resistance in the younger woman towards the entire situation. Her impression of Catherwood's power had grown during the visit he was making them. But it was part of her plan of life at this period to hold herself in cool regions of feeling. She was passing through that phase of intellectual development during which the intoxication of the mental faculties is as great a temptation as the grosser and more easily perceived intoxication of the senses to coarser natures. Every life touching hers with force became a study. Every situation affording dramatic possibilities made her analytic.

But no reader of human nature could look at her without realizing that she was constitutionally open to those deep passions which, the longer their influence is deferred, the greater their intensity and concentration.

She sat beside her grandmother, tall and radiant, an embodiment of vigor and purity. Her proud lips were rather firmly set.

When Catherwood rose, she lifted her eyes, and their expression was a kind of mental challenge to his ability. But his look was indrawn, and, in spite of herself, as she saw it, — saw it wander apparently over the entire congregation, but with a certain veiled luminosity, as if, already, he were in the supreme exercise of a priestly function and his attention absorbed by the unseen, — a thrill stole over her.

The silence of the congregation became accentuated.

The precentor lifted his hand. In unison the people sang,

“Praise God from whom all blessings flow.”

The long prayer, often so trying in the Presbyterian service, was, in the beginning, an expression of worship. Intercession for the various benevolences of the Christian world followed, then the larger supplication for humanity, and the minister paused. In his tones, in his phraseology, in which blended an accentuation of fervor and confidence of faith, there was a subtle, delicate assurance, as of a child coming to its father with the most secret desire of its heart. He prayed for his church.

The hymns that morning were stately, old-fashioned ones, and they were sung to the old tunes. Many a voice usually silent joined in —

“O, could I speak the matchless worth,
O, could I show the glories forth,
That in my Saviour shine.”

But it was the sermon, after all, towards which the general thought was turned. It was when Catherwood rose to give out his text that the two or three reporters present, still a great novelty in churches, focussed their attention. One could have picked out the elders and

deacons by their attitude. Samson himself could not have set his shoulders more resolutely for bulwark.

Hillerton sat in the middle aisle, a few pews back of Susanna. Till now, he had divided his attention between the service and a study of her profile. But from this moment, Catherwood engrossed him.

The minister's tone was clear and conversational, but occasionally declamatory. If he were eloquent, his gift was of the unpremeditated sort; it took his hearers unawares. As she listened, Susanna became aware that the extreme gentleness of his style was in some inexplicable way heightened by a denunciatory element within his capacity and near the surface, and that if there were slight doctrinal expression, doctrinal foundations were beneath the order and arrangement of the discourse.

There were depths of feeling and conviction in his voice as he announced, for his text, "God is love."

The sermon was as logical as the Westminster Catechism, but differed from the catechism in containing the element of pathos from beginning to end. Every kind of love was touched upon with dignity, fearlessness, and that beautiful Saxon plainness, far removed from coarseness, although allied to ultra simplicity. He placed the love of man for woman and of woman for man as the highest phase humanity can know of love in purely human relations, but hedged it about with limitations of such terrible significance that women took on a look of unconscious longing as though listening to some new evangel. While memory was active and conscience tender, he rose by a natural climax to his real theme — the love of God in making itself visible in the flesh through Jesus Christ. From this point forward he dwelt on the abnegation of love, the limitations in which love will confine itself for the beloved, the humiliation to which love will subject itself, the despair of love in seeking ways and means to ennoble that which is ignoble, to exalt that which, through whatever cause, has become debased. He did not say a word about total depravity; but he portrayed that something which the inner consciousness of mankind differentiates, if only for want of a better term, as sin; and he delineated with a delicate precision, poignant in its effect, that other something towards which all developing natures agonize

and which, if only for want of a better term, they call purity. He fell back, not upon argument, but upon those profound intuitions according to which civilized beings try to act, whatever the formularized state of their belief.

When he closed, there was an immediate rustle throughout the great congregation, and every one was conscious of how intense the silence had been till the last word was spoken.

Catherwood gave out the final hymn. As he read aloud, "Jesus, lover of my soul," his glance fell briefly on Susanna, and she realized the meaning of something in him which had puzzled her since their first meeting. She understood that his vocation was his supreme interest. Oddly enough, she perceived that she felt daunted. A dim antagonism arose within her. She began to draw a picture of a man who might be broad and chose to be narrow. She recalled the delightful social qualities of a minister with whose family she sometimes dined and where nothing, from first to last, in the visit suggested his calling, or the misery of the world. The wife and daughters were pretty and well-dressed; they saw all the new plays and heard all the best music; they entertained only the nicest people and had the reputation of being pushing and exclusive. The minister guarded them tenderly,—the girls, he insisted, being too delicate to teach in mission schools, and his wife, not having married his congregation but himself, being free to assume or set aside church duties as she pleased. She recalled, also, how much she enjoyed a tilt with this doctor of divinity over a new book or a new scientific theory, and how often his vocation never even occurred to her during an evening's conversation. And she kept iterating to herself that this was the natural, human way with ministers; it made them more approachable. All the while she heard Catherwood's voice, she felt a kind of delicious ecstasy of longing for something personal, she did not know what, and a nervous fear, while assuring herself that she was unconcerned, lest he should prove so narrow, because spiritually so intense, as to be moored, after all, to the Calvin Memorial for life.

On their way down the avenue, Mrs. Dutton talked continually of the sermon. "I felt sure you could find

no fault with it, dear, and it was a real comfort to me. I kept saying to myself, after he had finished under each head, 'Susanna will like that, I know.'"

"Be careful, grandmamma, here, or you will slip."

"I'm watching; I won't fall. I am quite firm on my feet this morning. Didn't you like the sermon right straight through, Susanna?"

"Yes, I did. I liked it all very much."

The old lady looked up with positive gratitude. "I thought we'd better come on ahead, for the elders and deacons will want to congratulate him and one another. I guess they feel very proud of their new minister. I am sure they ought to. I wish Mr. Catherwood felt as though he could stay with us indefinitely. He told me, though, before you came down to breakfast, that he had already rented rooms over on the East side, where he is going to live through the winter, to keep in touch with the life of the poor. When I expostulated, he said his sermons depended on it—that if they were not written week by week more from his heart and observation than his head, he wouldn't be able to fill his pulpit long."

"Well, it won't do, in these times," replied Susanna, haughtily, "to be too emotional."

Mrs. Dutton glanced up anxiously. "I don't think he is inclined that way. Even as a very young man, he was so well balanced."

Hillerton overtook them at this juncture. His good looks were of such a nature that success or pleasure greatly heightened them.

"What did you think of the sermon, Miss Kildare?"

"Oh, what every one else did, evidently."

"He's the right stuff for our purpose, no mistake. I was afraid, the first time I met him, that his drawing qualities were not first-class, but he is simply tremendous. I predict there won't be standing-room to-night."

There was now an immediate reaction in her mind towards Catherwood's probable point of view.

"I suppose all that is a secondary matter with him," she said, in a tone of disdainful carelessness.

"Not a bit of it. He knows on which side his bread is buttered. He has reduced everything to a fine art. The entire order of the service was a thing to study. And then the man looks so ecclesiastical. He is so delight-

fully harmonious with the Calvin Memorial." Hillerton laughed softly; his spirits were contagious.

"I predict we shall lift our entire debt within a year. There is plenty of money in the church, and we have got the man now to draw it out of some of these tough old moneybags."

"I have always considered Presbyterians most conscientious and liberal in the support of their denomination," replied Mrs. Dutton, with some warmth.

"Well, they are and they are not. They are like other denominations in one respect, certainly. They'll give, and give liberally, if they get hold of the right man to tickle their consciences. But it is the tickling process they like, and what they will pay for half the time. They will give box prices for it when you couldn't move them in any other way."

He continued to walk beside them, intent on seeing where they lived, and trusting, according to the easy fashions of the period, to be invited to call.

"I hope you find the pew you took desirable," he said, accosting Mrs. Dutton.

"I do; but my granddaughter thinks it a little near the precentor."

"Oh, we are going to drop that barbarous practice soon. The times demand a quartette choir. In fact, — please do not mention it, — I am corresponding now with the soprano of Opperman's concert troupe. I am afraid we cannot get her, though. She wants three thousand a year."

"I should not think you would engage her at any price," said Susanna, coldly.

He looked at her quizzically. "I presume you allude to her habit of taking too much wine occasionally. It belongs to the profession. It is a vice of the musical temperament, rather a necessity, within limits, of course, where there is such constant emotional outlay. She sings like an angel."

"I do not object to her at Chickering or the Academy of Music."

They turned into a side street, pausing, just beyond the avenue, at a broad and handsome stoop.

"These things are a matter of education," he continued, as they lingered, face to face. "What we want

at the Calvin Memorial are voices with a capacity for devotional expression, artists in church music, in fact, and Grunwald certainly is such an artist."

She smiled. Her smile meant almost anything.

Mrs. Dutton began to ascend the stoop, and Susanna, bowing, followed. Hillerton raised his hat and passed on. He had not been invited to call.

At dinner, an hour later, Susanna found herself responding sympathetically to those various signs of nervous strain in the minister so patent to any one with the student habit. He talked a great deal, and his conversation was alert and brilliant. There was a suspicion of a flush on his cheeks, and his eyes, shining with a soft yet piercing blackness, glowed with the fire peculiar to hazel-gray, deep-set eyes.

Susanna had feared that she would find him a rigid Sabbatarian; in fact, she hardly knew what she did not begin to fear concerning him. He possessed her thought, and it chagrined her.

There proved to be nothing restraining or restrained in his talk, and it roved over a good many themes.

She sought to introduce all sorts of subjects, usually denominated worldly, and he invariably listened with interest to what she had to say, and occasionally pursued her train of thought.

She discovered, with a frank admiration, that he had drawn no hard and fast lines as to what was Sundayfied. He had views on most matters, and he was sufficiently vigorous in temperament to have strong convictions. She was inconsistently delighted to discover that some of these convictions were temperamental rather than intellectual. But his chief idea just then, she perceived, was to let himself down as soon as he could from the strain of the morning; when she became conscious of his purpose, no one could have fitted herself with nicer adjustment to the situation.

He noticed the change; and she felt a throb of pleasure in meeting his glance of docile gratitude. She asked no more questions. She refrained from argumentative themes, and, with that feminine tact, at once so charming and inexplicable, told him a great many things about people he was likely to meet, but nothing which would not leave him free to let his own instinctive likes or dislikes operate.

Somehow, the relations of years ago seemed to begin to reestablish themselves, and when, a few minutes after dinner, he excused himself and went to his room, every other feeling on her part, for the time being, at least, was swallowed up in one of solicitude that he should get a good nap before beginning to look over his evening discourse.

He started out the next day, to take possession of his rooms on Avenue A, and in the afternoon Mrs. Dutton and Susanna went over to inspect them.

It was clear, crisp, winter weather. As the ladies approached the squalid neighborhoods of the extreme east side, they saw that the gutters in many places had refused to carry off the accumulated mixture of slush and muddy water. It had flowed over the sidewalks and streets, freezing, and rendering them slippery and dangerous. The fronts of houses looked smutty, and the windows, stained and bleared. Perhaps nothing differentiates the better from the poorer portions of New York more than the polished splendor of the windows in aristocratic quarters, and the opaque griminess of those in poorer sections with their cheap and dirty and crooked lace finery. The sun shone with the cold, metallic brilliancy of lengthening afternoons, contrasting, with cruel sharpness, the comfortable, beautiful luxury of the two women with the scant or ugly garments of the men, women, and children whom they passed. The leaden complexion of the children, their coarse, unkempt hair, devoid of the lustre belonging to youth, the hard, serious expression of their eyes — the general look of everybody, of lack of air and sleep, of water and nourishing food, oppressed Mrs. Dutton to tears, and awoke a rising indignation in Susanna.

"O my dear," said the old lady, "we have been poor enough, God knows, but it was nothing like this. I had no idea there were such places in New York."

"The ugliness and squalor seem intolerable. I feel like shutting my eyes and forgetting it."

"I guess if Mr. Catherwood can stand it, we can."

"Yes, indeed!" A genuine warmth and energy were in her tone.

They entered the half-open door of a tall, rickety building, flanked on one side by a corner liquor store,

whose highly varnished façade and lattices and breadth of bottled windows were second, in cheeriness, only to those of a beer saloon on the opposite corner, above which the name of Vroom Brothers & Co., catching the full rays of the sun, shone with dazzling splendor. Nothing else in the whole neighborhood looked either bright or orderly except three gilt balls over the basement window of the house where Catherwood had taken rooms.

The staircase they had to ascend stood far back in a long, narrow hall filled with the unmistakable odor of stale water-pipes. There was an oil-cloth on the passage, worn into great holes. The walls had once been painted green, but they were smoked and grimy, and only dimly discernible in the flare of one gas jet unshielded by a globe from the gusty wind sweeping in from the East River.

Mrs. Dutton took hold of the banister as they went up. It shook so under her grasp that she let it go in terror, bracing her hand step by step against the wall. The second hall was shrouded in almost total darkness, but they managed to grope towards the front, where two narrow doors huddled together suggested separate sets of rooms. They knocked at random on the left.

A moment later, they were inside the minister's apartment, still in a state of confusion, although giving some indication of its final appearance.

The rooms were tiny, comprising a kitchen, sleeping-room, and living-room, but good of their kind, as only one was dark, being dimly lighted from a court. The bedroom was already in order. A narrow iron bed with a cheap skin rug in front of it on an otherwise bare floor filled one corner. A chest of pine drawers, a washstand, over which hung a small mirror, and a wooden chair completed the furniture. A white shade was at the window, and curtains made of coarse white muslin were looped back on either side. The kitchen, too, had its equipment, very scanty, but sufficient for plain living.

Catherwood described, with sanguine elation, the woman he had found to come in to keep the rooms in order and prepare his meals. "I have nothing left to do here myself, you observe, but fit up the sitting-room. I would like, gradually, to make it a resort for poor men,

where they can at least get warm on cold nights, find a cup of coffee, a daily newspaper — and a friend." He smiled, looking at Susanna, as if sure of her sympathy and endorsement. "See what a rousing stove this is — cheerful, too, don't you think so, with its circle of isinglass windows? It makes almost enough light to read by. I tried it last night. I am going to fill this bookcase with a lot of popular books on all sorts of subjects for a kind of free circulating library. I am hoping, if my plan succeeds, to have an annex for women some day."

"They always have to wait, don't they?" she said, without bitterness, but with a certain wistfulness of tone.

"Their good time is near at hand," he replied encouragingly. "There is light along the horizon. Living streams must flow through natural channels, you know."

"Ah, but how long some of those channels have been obstructed."

His eyes flashed assent, but he did not reply.

"Are you sure these rooms are healthy?" inquired Mrs. Dutton, anxiously.

He shrugged his shoulders, although his expression was optimistic. "There is but one drain-pipe, and that, fortunately, is in the kitchen. The wind and frost at this season mitigate the street nuisances."

"The halls seemed horrible," said the old lady, her nose suggesting bad smells.

"Well, they are pretty bad, but uncommonly good for the neighborhood. And I am hoping to find the owner of the building, soon, and persuade him to make some alterations."

They walked over to the windows. Catherwood's eyes fell on the sign, "Vroom Brothers & Co."

"That name puzzles me so! 'Vroom, Vroom,' I keep saying to myself. I am sure I knew somebody once of that name."

"Of course you did!" Susanna laughed heartily. "Don't you remember the boy you collared, the first day you taught our school, and sent home?"

"Oh, that little rascal! Yes, yes." He looked quizzical. "Peter Vroom. I remember him. An insinuating, pugnacious, but cowardly boy; he had a sister — Neeltje."

A look of distress swept over her face.

"I remember all about poor Neeltje, too," he added briefly. "Is Peter connected with that family—the family of the sign?"

"He is part of the sign," she said, recovering her spirits.

"He is, is he!" A furrow deepened between his arched brows. "They keep a regular hell over there. I must go for him. He ought to know what his name covers."

His look was tense, his tone brusque. "It is a worse place than this," pointing to the other corner. "I have seen more broken-hearted women haunting these two corners in a week than during the rest of my lifetime. I saw a little girl this morning, without stockings, her poor frozen toes sticking through her ragged shoes, a tattered shawl pinned over her head, go into that place and come out with a quart of beer. She slipped on the ice along the crossing, spilling the beer and breaking the pitcher. A man rushed from a house on the block above, and kicked her till she rolled over and over. He left her lying there and went into Vroom Brothers'. He was her father."

"It is a terrible state of things, Mr. Catherwood," said Mrs. Dutton, tremulously; "but do you feel your duty lies here? Will not so much time and thought given here absorb you from church work? Your mission is to preach the Gospel, you know."

"It is, mother, most assuredly; but I must practise it, too."

It was the first time he had fallen back on the familiar name, and the old lady took his hand wistfully. Susanna turned away, a fine tingling coursing through her veins.

"Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. My chief work in the Calvin Memorial must be the quickening of Christians—making them co-workers with me—finding work for their hearts and hands just here, I hope. I must keep my people in mind of our universal brotherhood; I must tell them again and again that it is more blessed to give than to receive. exemplifying in my own life that I can be all things to all men for Christ's sake."

"Perhaps," said Susanna, inquiringly, "you like to live here. I have fancied that you might love asceticism for its own sake."

There was a momentary quivering of his broad, strong nostrils. A subtile, passionate look of homesick longing flitted over his face and disappeared, the look of a man who fails of recognition in the person from whom he most expects it.

"I suppose it is true that we none of us quite understand ourselves," he replied thoughtfully. "I suppose Spencer may be right, in part at least, in his theory of the nervous organism—that we are each the resultant of the habits of our ancestors. But I claim," he threw his head back, "I claim to be more than a quivering, palpitating mechanism. I claim that any uplift visible in me, while a logical outgrowth of what I have been and my fathers before me, is brought about finally by that divine spark called the soul, presiding over every expression of human volition. I grant I am hampered within certain limits,—why, I know not,—but hampered by an infinite mind, in order that this divine essence in me may have its fullest, eventual scope. It is enough to drive a man mad to suppose that the whole creation, from the rudimentary first cell to the loftiest genius, is blundering towards light through a material mechanism alone. The supposition is an insult to divine economy."

"I agree with you, Mr. Catherwood," said Mrs. Dutton, with gentle warmth. "I can't quite follow all your thought, but it sounds orthodox. The comforts of faith grow more and more precious to me with years."

Susanna smiled tenderly, as if her dear old grandmother were unconsciously making a senile admission. She glanced up at Catherwood a bit humorously, and said: "You are able to believe in God as scientific and fatherly too! Not necessarily anthropomorphic, but having a hand—no, not a hand—that won't do; that is too material—but a directing power, minute by minute, over humanity."

He nodded.

"Well, I like to believe it."

"Ah, you must pass beyond the point of letting your beliefs be a question of what you like." He looked at

her with sudden, tense sharpness. "Beliefs, to be worth anything, must be profound convictions."

She glanced at him provocatively. "I was not speaking *ex cathedra*. You would not have me express myself in such familiar talk as if I were before the session?"

"No, no." There was a tender, deprecating tone in his voice. "My surroundings have made me overstrenuous, I think. I shall get used to them in a few days."

"I want to ask you a question, my son," said the old lady, anxiously. "Have you conferred with the session on this step you are taking?"

"Yes, mother. I made it a condition of accepting the call, although with a partial compromise on my part. My library is to remain at the study connected with the church; I set it up and established myself there, first. Four days out of seven the church study will be my headquarters, and during that interval only my sleeping hours will be spent here. From ten at night till eight in the morning, though, my time is absolutely my own, and thus I hope each day to sow a little seed in this field of my parish."

"You will need those four days in another world to keep yourself civilized, to keep you in touch with humanity in the broadest sense. And there are just as many heathen among the rich, just as much groping after the light in the upper strata, just as many suffering souls among the intelligent, as here," said Susanna. "I am sure you will find a few publicans and sinners in the Calvin Memorial, also, if you will go in search of them, — whole fields of weedy soil to plant with sturdy convictions, like those, say, of Cotton Mather or Jonathan Edwards."

"To-morrow is one of the days for prospecting along the central ridges of the city, and I will remember your advice," he replied, with a touch of raillery. He saw the tender glow in her eye, heard the personal element in her plea, and he rejoiced.

"I have made up my mind to one thing," said Mrs. Dutton, with smiling determination. "Our third floor back is a great, big, sunny room, and I am going to put a lot of comfortable things there, — a lounge, an easy-chair, a writing-table, — and that room is to be yours. There you are to come if you are ever sick or overtired."

It seems to me the trouble with everybody nowadays is, that they act as if our forefathers had altogether failed in moral responsibility, and as if this one generation had to do the work of the world for all time, past, present, and future. I suppose I am growing old, but I do get so weary of seeing everybody in a hurry; and you, Catherwood, are worse than Susanna, even. I do not see how you are going to get through with all you have planned."

He bent over and kissed her. "Thank you for that room. I may have to avail myself of it very soon. But I hope not, I hope not."

The sun had already disappeared from the opposite houses when the two ladies retraced their steps down the narrow stairs, Catherwood accompanying them a few blocks.

When he had left them, the old lady said to her granddaughter, "He is burning his candle at both ends! I am afraid he won't hold out—and the Calvin Memorial is such a remarkable opportunity for a man of his years."

CHAPTER VII

ON Susanna's twenty-fourth birthday, Mrs. Dutton presented her with deeds for several pieces of real estate. Most of the land left by Egerton Brereton was situated on the rocky soil of the upper fifties, and its value had increased so rapidly that the old lady was considered among brokers an important holder of valuable plots. Here and there a parcel of lots had been sold, and the money invested for purposes of speculation in land further up town. From these causes, as well as a genuine interest in building, Susanna's course of study under one of the noted architects of the day was marked by progressive zeal and industry.

Her knowledge, as events proved, was destined to be of much practical service to Catherwood, one of whose chief concerns was the better housing of the poor. He was so single-minded, that he was not fettered by delicacy in approaching the rich landlord element of his congregation on the subject, and, accordingly, not long after his installation, appointed a committee of some of the principal men in the church to investigate tenement sections and submit a report.

Meanwhile, at the monthly meeting of the session, the minister kept such a firm hand on all church matters, that he began to acquire no little fame as a moderator.

He had a pleasant tact with the older men and that genuine wisdom of a new-comer in studying local customs, and in making as few innovations as possible, lest he should unwittingly trespass upon something as valuable to the elders as the law of precedent to a Briton. Hillerton and he had gone hand in hand in their efforts, an illustration to not a few who were watching his progress, of how happily a pastor, though most spiritually minded, can work in harmony with a man who looks upon every

concern of life, from that of the family to the nation, as a business contract, pure and simple.

Catherwood was as desirous as Hillerton for a choir, and it was his final plan, since each church in the denomination had such wide latitude in its order of service, to elaborate the musical portion, believing that the Episcopalians and Roman Catholics had too long held the supremacy in such a valuable adjunct to worship and incentive to devotional thought and feeling.

Although not much had been said in detail, as whatever change that might be made was to be held over till the following winter, the two men finally came to an open difference concerning one particular. Hillerton was in search of voices, talent, the highest artistic culture, whatever the character or belief of the singers. He held that as long as they should perform their part well, and the deacons pay the salary promptly, that there the affair ended. Catherwood, on the other hand, insisted that if a choice lay between two tenors, for example, one of whom was the greater artist, but the other of better moral standing and Christian in his belief, if not in his profession, that there should not be a minute's hesitation in choosing the latter.

The men had talked the subject over and over, Catherwood in the end asserting squarely that when action was taken, he would have to go even one step further — refuse to consent to any man or woman taking part in the singing, by official act, unless such singing could fairly be presumed to be devotional.

"That is not our concern at all. We can't be either inquisitors or Puritans. We can't examine their state of mind or grace from Sunday to Sunday."

"You are waiving the real question," replied the minister, with a certain gentle persistence which Hillerton found annoying in the extreme.

"Well, well, we two can't decide it alone. We are going along swimmingly now, at all events. The session will have to settle it in the autumn."

Catherwood assenting, they began to talk over plans for enlarging and beautifying the church. The minister was deeply read in ecclesiastical architecture, and he laid model after model before the elder, who was quick to grasp details pertaining to space or general utility,

although slower to perceive refinements of ornamentation. But he had a genuine respect for Catherwood's taste and knowledge as the latter had for his larger practical experience.

"It will mean much," said the minister, laying his hand affectionately on Hillerton's shoulder, "if you further any proposition I may make. The alterations would have to be undertaken in the summer, I suppose, say a year from now. I would like to preserve the general ground-plan of our edifice, for there is no form so well adapted as that of the basilica to give light and space combined. Besides, it suits the dignity of our simpler form of worship. We require the wide middle aisle, roomy side aisles, a flat ceiling, the gallery just as it is, and big windows not too sombre with heavy stained glass."

"You are planning a Congregational meeting-house."

"Congregational and Presbyterian are the same in this respect."

"It will be too plain."

"The decoration, man, the decoration will change all that. We can make it unique. I would have a wainscot of choice marbles in warm tones. The pillars supporting the gallery could be modelled after some rare Italian ones selected and colored in harmony with the rest of the interior. I would do away with that abomination of modern churches, papered walls, and, through the medium of paint or stone, produce necessary color effects. The panels of the gallery could be painted by a mural artist with pictures illustrative of the life of Christ."

"There are no mural artists in this country. Think of what it would cost to bring them over from France or Italy, or even to have the painting done there."

"The cost need only be measured by the capacity of the congregation," insisted Catherwood. "Look at the houses our rich men dwell in. This is to be the house of God."

Hillerton glanced at him with a friendly jocularly, much as a father might at an oversanguine child.

"I think we should have two organs," pursued the minister. "Whether we used them both or not at first, they would be there, ready for our choir in its perfected

form. Can't you hear 'Rock of Ages' rendered with such instrumentation and voices as we shall finally have? Hymns like that, properly sung, are enough to swing timid souls into the exercise of such faith that only the further energy of a slight volition will set them praying. We Protestants have sadly neglected the emotional nature as a spiritual lever."

"The emotional nature is gunpowder; it is dynamite. Here's the source." Hillerton tapped his head. "Brains, not emotion, formulated the Westminster Catechism. That is the rock of ages for me as far as this life is concerned. There is no gainsaying it. You may like it or not, but you can't get around it. If I had my way in the Sunday-school, I would cram it into the memory of children while they are too young to kick against it. It would stick then; it would influence their lives, whether or not. I am not what you would call a conservative on most questions, but I stand by the Catechism. I am a regular, blue Presbyterian when it comes to that."

"It contains a wonderful body of doctrine." Catherwood's serious eyes looked brooding and melancholy.

It was through the constant planning for the enlargement of the church, that Hillerton and Susanna finally drew together, and, during the mild spring evenings, not a week passed without Catherwood and the elder dropping in to get her views, and also, though at second-hand, those of the architect under whom she was studying. In the background of Hillerton's thought, moreover, was the hope that Mrs. Dutton, and perhaps Miss Kildare as well, would be substantial contributors to the improvements.

The more she saw him, the more Hillerton grew upon Susanna. There was a big cheeriness about him. He was handsome without consequent loss of manliness. He dressed with scrupulous elegance. His impressive complacency, as if life and he were on good terms, his deep voice and fine physique, made every one feel that he was not to be trifled with. His air was that of a man used to having his own way, but he was quite destitute of any tendency to a nagging, small tyranny in details, often the accompanying characteristic. He was also generous in the line of his likes, and thus it happened that both

Catherwood and she invariably saw the pleasantest side of a nature neither large, magnanimous, nor intellectual, but upright within limits, as well as practical and energetic.

The minister became aware, as the summer approached, of a deepening regard on Hillerton's part for Miss Kildare. The discovery filled him with a dismay threatening to paralyze his usefulness. He went about for several days like a man dazed. He grew visibly thinner, losing appetite and strength. He avoided Hillerton. He could not trust himself to see Susanna.

A feverish reaction then set in, and his various lines of activity animated him to an increase of fervor. He had the leisure as the season advanced to spend more time on the East side, and he threw himself into this work with renewed enthusiasm.

There were days when every book in the library was in circulation, and he felt rejoiced and encouraged. Every night saw from ten to twenty men gathered in his sitting-room, reading the papers, smoking, playing games, or drinking coffee and eating the bread and cold meat provided.

Half his salary had gone thus far to the support of his idea; but the growth of his influence, in such a neighborhood, he had found a very slow and toilsome process. But it had grown; the seed had taken root, and it was his expectation that gradually helpers would rally around him, and the plant, finally, prove self-supporting.

The windows were now open night and day. The avenue began to reek with the odor of decaying garbage and the filthy air rushing from tenements overcrowded with an unwashed population. There was a perpetual, sickening aroma of stale liquor in the atmosphere. The craft on the river kept up a constant whistling. The everlasting tinkle of the street-car bells, and the rumble of beer-wagons, and heavy freight of all kinds to the piers, made a never-ceasing jargon of noise.

As the heat increased, the minister felt leaden and dreary. Occasionally, while talking, he found his thought breaking off in the middle. He prepared his sermons with minutest care, writing out each detail, lest his memory should fail at a critical moment.

Often, in the deep watches of the night, during the

partial lull in the roar of teeming life hedging him so closely, a sudden calmness of spirit would steal over him and he could think of Susanna with equanimity. He could even contemplate the loss of her out of his life, in those nearer and dearer relations which so long had been his cloudy pillar by day and his pillar of fire by night. At such times, he would decide to go to see her the next day, and take his chance, like a man, fairly and squarely with Hillerton.

At this point, he would review all she had looked or said or done, but though there were straws, showing here and there a deeper current, he could win no assurance that she cherished a unique regard for him.

He felt an incipient masculine resistance to her splendid self-poise, to her Atalanta-like love of freedom, to her energy of intellectuality, to her buoyant physical strength and beauty, lifting her above the depression of weaker natures and giving her such a wide choice of the good things of this world. And then he would lash himself with the scourge of his own censure, telling himself that he had had a hand in making her what she was, and that she was only what a large proportion of all women should eventually be—and that a magnificent dower of herself to a man by a woman was granted only when she was thus unhampered and certain to choose with freedom and deliberation.

But when morning came, his courage failed. Usually after such nights, if he were free to do so, he sought diversion in parochial calls.

It was three weeks before he finally mastered himself sufficiently to call at Mrs. Dutton's. It was Celinda who met him, to say that the old lady and her granddaughter had gone away to remain till September; that Mrs. Dutton felt very bad not to tell him good by and would have sent for him, only she had been so feeble the past week. "And she asked me to leave dis key wid you, Mr. Catherwood. It's de key to your room. Dere will be a woman here all summer to look after de house, so you can get in any time. I'm closin' up, befo' j'inin' Mis' Dutton, I am."

He stood irresolute, Celinda regarding him with the bland but shrewd inquiry of her race. "Is dere a mesage you'd like to be a-sendin', Mr. Catherwood?"

"Well, n-o. Where have they gone?"

"I don' know es I know. I s'pect to meet 'em on a train, nex' Sat'day. Hain't dey told you anyt'ing 'bout deir plans?"

"Oh, yes, in a general way. But I wasn't aware they expected to leave so soon."

"Dey didn't. It wuz all 'count Mis' Dutton not feelin' well. I did hear 'em say," she added reluctantly, as if taking a liberty with any knowledge she might possess, "I did hear 'em say, ef Mis' Dutton got 'long all right, p'raps, de las' o' July, dey'd try de ole farm a spell. Mr. Hillerton he bin here, too, an' much disapp'inted to find Mis' Susanna gone."

Catherwood looked at Celinda, and Celinda looked at him, and something in her mild, watchful eye told him that she knew his secret and was on his side. It was the first thing that had given him a tangible hope. He decided to accept the midsummer vacation the elders had offered him, — to make Susanna, then, his first thought and pursuit till he had either won or lost her.

Meanwhile, Hillerton had seen much of her. Although she had gone away somewhat piqued over Catherwood's continued absence, she could not deny to herself that Hillerton's company was rather more enjoyable than otherwise, when she saw him alone and the talk was not too closely confined to ecclesiastical architecture. There was, indeed, something rather wearing in the terrible conscientiousness with which Catherwood stuck to his theme. She had gone to concerts with Hillerton also, and was pleased and surprised to discover he was a good musical critic. He had sent her flowers, and as she adjusted some in her belt the second time they came, she had an amused query, surcharged with emotion, whether, under any circumstances, Catherwood would give time or thought to such gallantry. But, as she walked downstairs to Hillerton, the next time the elder called, she was asking herself where the minister was and remembering, with a note of anxiety in the thought, that he had seemed tired and strained the last time she heard him preach; and then with a haughty vigor of determination of which she was thoroughly capable, she dismissed him from her mind.

She was not sorry to leave the city a little earlier than

they had planned to go; for, although she could succeed in banishing Catherwood from her mind on occasions, he came back, at unexpected moments, and more and more engrossingly.

She shrank with instinctive fear from all in which love for a man of his type, his views, and his profession would involve her, and, as far as she knew herself at this moment, she preferred to maintain their present relations.

She had her dreams, at times, of love, — its fever, its joy, — and a passionate throb of anticipation, of longing for some element in her life that would lift her more effectually out of herself than circumstances, people, or her pursuits had yet done, would sweep over her and possess her; but these times were rare, and her satisfaction in the present was a very real thing.

She was on exactly the same level of approach towards Hillerton that he was towards her, except that she was at an earlier stage. She was studying him with the utmost deliberation, pleased over each trait she found likeable, a great admirer of his good looks, and with a certain worldly *rapproch* concerning life as something to be enjoyed to the full in all sensuous ways, no matter what one's general religious attitude. The leading-strings of the church were for men and women of limited intellectual capacity or acquirement; for people like herself, the church was a spiritual quickener rather than teacher — one of many influences and interests, and better held at too great a distance than clasped to one's heart as the dearest object in life. The ever-present, passive element of femininity was notwithstanding strong within her. She was content to have her fort stormed, instinctively resisting each attack, but with an idle wonder about which assault would finally compel surrender without capitulation.

And so her grandmother and she went away, and new scenes, the dreamy glamour of summer, and the vagueness of feeling and desire which first absence brings, filled her days with contentment and her nights with peace.

Meanwhile, Catherwood had made a discovery, destined, he felt, either to strain the relations between Hillerton and himself or draw them closer together. He had had great difficulty in learning who was the owner of the row of houses in one of which his rooms were.

He had paid his rent to an agent, and his questions each time had been successfully parried. But, as the summer filth increased, and typhoid fever broke out in the neighborhood, he redoubled his energies, and finally learned that the entire block belonged to his friend.

A great fear seized him of doing Hillerton some injustice, the fear intensified by the knowledge of their mutual regard for Susanna.

Before taking further steps, he set about finding out the sum total of rent paid by the block; but when he heard the enormous amount which the beer shop and the liquor store afforded, he subtracted these, and made an estimate of yearly repairs on the basis of his own rooms, not forgetting roofs, cellars, and sidewalks; these repairs he deducted, also taking off a sixth for empty rooms and non-paying tenants, and found that the entire property still yielded an income of nine per cent.

His course was now clear, and, disagreeable as it was, his first duty in tenement reform lay with his own elder.

But Hillerton was out of town much of the time at this season, and meanwhile the fever increased, the city authorities stepped in, the agent was called to task, — several improvements were made, — then the fever abated, and Catherwood finally decided that the whole matter would better wait till cooler weather.

The first Sunday in August dawned under a sky indicative of great heat. The air was unrelieved by sea-breezes. By ten o'clock, the bricks and flagging, the tin roofs, and unshaded streets were glowing as if in a furnace.

The minister walked over to his study at an early hour, and the shut-up appearance of many of the houses in the neighborhood of the church gave him a sense of space and isolation rather comforting than otherwise, after the noise and crowds of his tenement district.

He was conscious of fatigue and nervous tension, and there was an elation in his manner which his appearance did not support. Once within the coolness and darkness of the great, ugly, bare room, his sermon for the morning spread before him, such lethargy overcame him that he realized it was time for the vacation which had been offered him and which he had accepted on condition of a supply during his absence. Not that he thought it

wrong to close the Calvin Memorial for a few Sabbaths, but because he had still to settle the question in his own mind whether at intervals vacations were a cardinal necessity to brain workers, and whether the one he was about to enjoy should be held as an exception rather than a precedent.

He was still a young man, young enough to feel a tremendous personal responsibility concerning every question of the day; the questions of recreation and amusement were only just beginning to be rolled under the American cud as food for sweet thought. He had never really taken a vacation in his life, and this was the first time one had been thrust upon him. The experience was novel, pleasant, and refreshing. His whole being turned to it, like a thirsty man to water. And the vacation, translated, read — Susanna.

The sparse congregation, the deep, shady spaces under the galleries, the low, trembling, liquid tones of the organ, the hush and order and elegance, smote upon his sensitive organization with unusual force as he entered the sanctuary already unspeakably dear to him. There was now an element of kinship very sweet and tender among many of his hearers and himself. It was especially discernible on this Sabbath, whose services would close his initiatory work with his new people. He felt that he was theirs and they were his in a more intimate sense than he ever had before.

He did not return to the East side till late in the evening. The night was humid, sultry, and suffocating. The thermometer in his rooms registered fever heat. But he fell asleep some time after midnight, to dream he walked once more with Susanna through the forest, holding her little red-mittened hand, and listening to the melody of her childish treble; and then, suddenly, he lost her, in the confusion and uproar going on in front of a district school at play-time.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Nicholas went out the second time from that old Dutch homestead, he had no realizing sense of where he should go. He halted in dumb irresolution under the hickories, conscious that the factitious strength upholding him thus far was rapidly failing.

He looked towards the barns, but a terrible fear, born of horror of contact with Saskia, shut off the thought of that shelter, while the increasing moonlight recalled his lifeless father swinging like some huge pendulum. A rising repulsion seized him.

He walked on, his heart beating like a hammer, his legs tottering with a strange numbness of which he could not get control.

He turned in the direction of Klacs, the snow creaking under his tread, the world a bleak, homeless, wintry solitude.

When the Dutton gable began to rise above the dip in the road, he thought of the broken pane in the west window. Coming to the house, he walked in front of it; it looked long unvisited and unopened. He tried the doors and windows; they were securely locked.

A sharp pain, like a knife thrust, shot through his side. Recovering his breath, he went to the back of the house, under the locusts, now trees of a considerable size. They had never been trimmed, and the snow from their branches fell like powder as he knocked against one and another in his uncertain walk. The great drift under the window sloped like a giant's grave and mocked his further progress.

Plunging into it, and putting his arm through the broken pane, he succeeded in opening the window. By a tremendous effort, he hauled himself out of the snow and up on the sill, leaping into the room with a wild,

defiant cry. It was the cry of a hunted soul, pursued by visible and invisible forces, trembling on the tottering verge of reason — the cry of a soul forsaken of its own, unutterably lonely, and suddenly, wildly jubilant that a deserted house had revealed a heart tenderer than the one of flesh and blood from which he had been driven. He forgot that his bag and umbrella lay under the trees. He forgot the open window. He was under shelter, and with a sense of freedom, in a region where a few minutes before he had shrunk from the universe.

He pulled up the curtains, and the moonlight flooded everything. It seemed yesterday instead of years since he had seen the parlor.

He sank into a chair, revelling in sweet memories.

His feet and hands felt like ice; there was a queer hurt sensation about his heart; his face burned. Strange, fantastic pictures, made up of confused memories of the near and distant past, danced before his vision. He could not tell if he were awake or dreaming. Banks of rare exotics began to heap themselves before his eyes, — flowers of all kinds, all colors, with sweet, intoxicating perfumes, — and while he looked and wondered, they floated away in the air like feathers, and a furious snow-storm swirled and drifted within the narrow confines of the room. While marvelling why it did not cover him under and drown him with cold, splendid flames of electric light, blue and red and yellow, danced hither and thither, licking his hands and darting away, kissing his cheeks and thrilling his heart with their kindness. Oh, how beneficent the flames were! If they only had voices to speak some soothing word of friendliness! But now his ears were ravished with melody from instruments of many kinds, swept by unseen fingers. Harps and organs and flutes, violins, and all manner of stringed instruments stood in orderly rows, one above another, higher than the ceiling — there was no ceiling — higher than the sky! And the sweet sounds soothed his weary spirit. Delicious odors as if from heavenly fields of perfume distilled a heavy, blissful, narcotic stupor throughout his members. He tried to reach after and seize beautiful winged creatures, tiny and shadowy and white, flitting before his eyes.

His arms sank; he sighed; he felt himself falling —

falling. What did he care? He was so happy. He made a faint struggle to regain — what? No, he could not. It was Susanna, grandly dressed, — Susanna, smiling, radiant, coming down an endless flight of crystal stairs — to him? to him? No, the stairs broke and shivered in a thousand sparkling, blinding diamonds, leaving her soaring in dazzling, ascending pink and golden clouds. She was smiling — vanishing. With a deep groan he fell headlong on the floor.

An hour later, a soft thud announced the descent of a sleigh down the hill. There was no jingle of bells, but, instead, the pleasant tones of Caty Ann's voice made music on the silent air. She was talking in a peaceful, voluble way to Ike, who was seated in the straw beside her, her husband a little forward in order to guide his horse better.

After the funeral, Caty Ann had taken the opportunity to visit her only sister, Fytje Pickel, who lived a mile beyond the Vrooms'. There Mrs. Van Voorhies had relieved, to some extent, her burden of mind concerning Saskia's doings and the great pity of it all that Nicholas was left without a penny, and even on the way home was continuing the theme.

"I don't see, fer de life o' me, how Samson hed de conscience to witness sech a will. It brought a jedgment down on old Storm, an' like es not it will on us. Saskia's evil days aire a-comin', jes' es sure es you live. My, how gloomy dose locuses look! es if dey wus a-whisperin' togeder over sompin'. What's det a-lyin' dere on de snow?"

Janse stopped, all three peering under the trees.

"I t'ink I see an umbrel'," she whispered. "De winder's up. I do wonder ef t'ieves is come to dese pairts et last."

Giving a contemptuous grunt, Janse began laboriously releasing himself from his swaddlings. Handing the reins to his wife, he sprang out. Climbing over the fence and crawling under the trees, he examined the bag and umbrella lying in the snow. A brief survey told him what to expect, and, going in through the open window, he found Nicholas.

Van Voorhies tried to rouse him, but unsuccessfully. He went to the window.

"Drive round to de steps," he called to Caty Ann, "an' you an' Ike git out."

Unlocking the door, the key of which was fortunately on the inside, he struggled through the deep snow to meet the sleigh.

"Storm's in dere, an', fer aught I know, froze unconscious. I can't rouse him. Give me de shovel."

Caty Ann, in consternation, silently handed out the shovel which they had taken along for drifts, and presently, on either side of the path, he had thrown enough snow to render the entrance possible to the dumpy figure of his wife.

Meanwhile, she had been stirring and covering a bed in the straw.

"We've got to carry him out, Ikey," she kept iterating to her son, who bobbed his head emphatically, "carry him out! An' you must help—must hold on strong—strong!"

He laughed with delight, imitating her clutch of the side of the sleigh.

"Yes—jes' so; jes' so!" she replied approvingly.

Nicholas was soon laid in the bottom of the sleigh; all the robes were taken to cover him; and the Van Voorhies, warmed by their exertions and benevolence, drove rapidly away, making fast progress on the smoother highway.

A light twinkled in the kitchen of the Storm house as they passed. "It seems jes' like a spot given over to wickedness," said Caty Ann. "'Twouldn't s'prise me a bit, 'twouldn't, ef det ole man walked. I t'ink I'll keep shy o' Saskia fer a while. Do you s'pose she turned Nick out? She'd be ekil to it. I wish we wus home, an' I a-rubbin' an' fussin' over him. What ef we can't bring him to! Oh, dear!"

She drew a chattering sigh. The cold was beginning to penetrate.

"Can't you mek de ole hoss go a leetle faster, faather? We'll all git our death." She turned Ike's collar up and pulled his worsted cap further over his ears. "There, faather, you're sneezin'!" and tearing off an extra shawl from her own shoulders, she threw it around his, silencing his resistance by saying, "Now,

I ain't cold a bit! I wus only makin' b'lieve 'bout myself to git you to hurry."

After a brief silence, she exclaimed joyfully, "Dere's our chimbleys!"

When the sleigh stopped in front of the low stone house, she vaulted over the edge, and in a second was turning the key in the deep-set door. A rush of summer air spoke of the comfort within.

"We'll put him on our bed fust-off," she said, as they carried Nicholas in. "He'll thaw out faster in de livin'-room. But, es soon es we ken git de best room het up, he shall hev it. I noticed how holler-eyed he looked at de fun'ral, an' I sez to myself, 'You aire de only mourner, you aire, in all dis crowd.'"

An hour later, Nicholas suddenly opened his eyes, but their stare was vacant.

Caty Ann paused in her rubbings, putting the bottle of apple-jack down on the table and bending over him. "It's Mis' Van Voorhies, Nickie. I'm a-goin' to tek keer on you till you git well. You ain't got not'in' to fret or worrit over."

He made no response, and presently fell into a troubled sleep.

When Janse came in, Caty Ann was standing at the foot of the bed, and her round, full face was troubled. "He's goin' to hev a spell o' sickness. How's de oder room a-heatin' up? Hev you hung de feder bed in front o' de fire es I told you?"

"It's es hot es a mustard-plaster a'ready. De pillars is all puffed out wid de shakin' an' heatin'. What meks you t'ink he ain't goin' to git 'round right away?"

"Woll," lifting her brows solemnly, "I don't like de look o' his eye. I don't like de nater o' his breadin'. I can't altogeder splain de signs, but he's got 'em, ev'ry one. We must send fer Dr. Vliet. You stand here an' I'll go an' mek up de room. De sooner we git him settled down, de better."

Although the Van Voorhies' house was built and furnished on much the same plan as the Storms', there was an air about things that made it seem different. The curtains of Caty Ann's beds were looped farther back. The big fireplaces were used more frequently. The brass

candlesticks and andirons were never suffered to lose their polish from damp and darkness.

If the lonely man could have roused to consciousness, for one brief moment, to take in his surroundings, his long illness might have been diverted of half the horrors besetting his overtaxed and saddened brain.

It was March when he came to a realizing sense of his condition. Late one afternoon, towards the end of the month, he opened his eyes and looked wonderingly around. The low, raftered ceiling, the broad bed with its hooped canopy, the deep-set windows through which the sun was shining, the vast fireplace where a few embers smouldered, made him think for a minute that he was in his old home. Time was annihilated, and he expected to see his mother come in.

But his home had never looked like this. Rigidity was stamped on all the rooms. His thoughts wandered; he fell asleep.

When he awoke, he knew by the light that it was morning. A dreamy, delicious tide of life was in his veins. He felt hungry, felt expectant. But where was he?

The door was softly pushed open and Caty Ann entered on tip-toe. When he saw her, he understood. He attempted to hold out his hand, but it fell weak and lifeless on the checkered counterpane.

Her joy was motherly and bountiful. But she had been a nurse too long to undo her work. She would not allow him to try to talk. She fed him with her own hand, now and then stroking his long, bony fingers and pressing them softly, seeming to divine, by that intuition granted to tender-hearted women, that he had been starved in more ways than one.

All day long, he sank into naps of the most refreshing slumber, and, each time he awoke, felt a little better.

The afternoon waned. The sunlight began to fall across the rag carpet in long, bright bands, the brasses caught the light and became themselves smaller suns. A stand of flowers in one of the windows glowed with the vivid, tender green of house-plants, emitting a gentle fragrance blended of the earth, geraniums, and tea-roses. How sweet it all was! An impression pervaded his being corresponding to the word "home." Never before in his

experience had that word had a meaning. Its blessed import had reached him when he had least expected it — reached him under the shadow of mountains which, in the past, had seemed to be forever shutting him in to repressions — to denials.

A gently soothing inrush of gratitude and hope set his heart to throbbing, as if it were making an effort to beat in unison with new issues in life. Was there, after all, somewhere, in the vastness of the universe, the tender love of a divine Father, who did shield poor, groping, human souls at those rare moments when the stress was too great, when the battle went against them, yea, when dreadful fear, overtaking them, filled all the chambers of being with despair? Perhaps there was — perhaps there was! When he grew stronger, he would talk about it with Catherwood. Catherwood had such a faculty of faith in some power higher than matter, and a solid grasp, as well, of the scientific aspect of things. Suddenly, a long array of what he had previously termed biological axioms began to surge through his memory. And law, immutable law! the grim sequence of unalterable effects from causes flushed his face and harassed his feeble strength.

Caty Ann came in, her countenance smiling and coaxing. She carried a big bowl of warm milk. She held it for him to drink. He took it all greedily. She bent over and kissed him, patting his cheek. Like a child he turned it against her soft, warm palm.

Oh, the blessed tenderness of the woman nature — the unquestioning, sympathizing, caressing tenderness. It would never, never fit into immutable law. It was above law — higher! Again, a delicious, reposeful sense of care, human and divine, touched his soul with deep conviction. He drew a long, resting sigh, and once more sleep wrapped him in her beneficent embrace.

Caty Ann went out to the living-room where Janse was reading, with a certain pomp of learning, a weekly newspaper to which he had recently subscribed; the reading was a slow and painful process, and the paper a costly and rather doubtful novelty.

She laid her hand on his shoulder, her eyes full of tears. "He's pickin' up like a baby det's got t'rough teethin'. He'll be a-settin' out here in a week."

Glad of an excuse to desist from his labors, Janse solemnly folded the paper, staring at his wife a full minute before replying.

"It do seem strange, Caty Ann, doosn't it, thet when we'd ben glad an' willin' to keer fer a son like Nicholas, he sh'uld ben t'rown away on his old beast of a faather an' lef' to freeze to death by a wumman like Saskia."

"Woll, faather, she's ben come up wid by Prov'dence. He do hev a way of trippin' up people. But I don't know how I'm ever to find words to git the idee started in det poor feller's brain. Now ef it wus Ikey, — God bless him, — I'd jes' hev to keep a-repeatin' an' a-repeatin', an' talkin' sharp here an' low there, an' arter a while he'd at least know sompin', even if it wusn't de right t'ing. I don't t'ink Ike's 'xactly an idjit, do you?"

The farmer shook his head emphatically. "He never war an idjit. He's got es many idees of his own kind es you'n me. It's ben a gret comfort to me, ever sence I come to thet conclusion. An' I want you to onderstand, Caty Ann, when I hanker arter a son like Nicholas, I don't mean fer one single minute but what Ikey'd hev his place — an' a place wot no oder c'uld fill."

"He's an awful comfort. How lonesome I'd ben all dese years widouten him to pet! An' cert'nly Nick hev es queer ways of talkin' es Ikey. He's used de greatest lot of harum-skarum words, — I t'ink he must a made 'em up. One day it wus afferent an' efferent nerves, over an' over. Did you ever hear o' dem kind, faather?"

Janse shook his head, as if the very sound of the words was foolish.

"I hain't, neider. An' anoder day it wus, oh, sompin' wery cur'us." She rubbed her head. "I've got it — de word wus heteredet'ry — no — dat wusn't it. 'Twas hereditary! Over an' over he said dat one word. An', faather," she leaned over, whispering, "he's talked sech a lot 'bout Susanna. My, you'd t'ink she wus a gret lady to a heerd him a-goin' on. It teched me, too. I jes' cried es hard es I could cry."

"Susanna wus a likely gurl," said the farmer, thoughtfully.

Caty Ann nodded. "An' while she wus so sweet, she wus proud-sperited, too. So wus Mis' Dutton, only it

wus so deep down in her, det it'd tek me by s'prise, when it come to de top. But it wus dere, all de time, same es cream in milk, before it sets. Woll, we've lived to see gret changes, hain't we, faather? An' to t'ink det Mr. Vroom folloed Nick's faather so soon. An' I can't help it — I'm glad, an' I keep glad det Peter got all de prupperty, an' Saskia what she deserved, even if it did give her a 'clipse."

"You hain't got de right word, dere, mudder. A 'clipse is de shadder thet crosses de moon. Dat ain't what Saskia died wid. It wus a fit. 'Twas a 'cliptic fit — dat's it — dat's what Dr. Vliet called it — a 'cliptic fit!"

"Woll, I hope I'll remember to mek it clear to Nicholas, when he's strong 'nough to hear. To t'ink he's goin' to git his rights, arter all! An' to t'ink dat wid all de fussin' over dem two farms, t'ings aire jes' es dey wus, 'ceptin' Neeltje an' Storm an' Vroom an' Saskia, you may say, hez all lost dere lives in tryin' to change what wusn't to be changed. I don't s'pose Peter'll come back here to live, nor Nick, neider. I wonder what dey'll do wid deir big farms."

"Woll, ef what I hear's true, dere'll be a change in sev'ral farms hereabouts. Dey're drivin' stakes t'rough de old graveyard at Mastics fer a new railroad, right 'cross all dem Vroomses where dey lie es thick es blackberries; an' yist'day, I see 'em a-walkin' over de upper eend of de Dutton farm an' t'rough de Storm medders towards de maple orchard."

"Oh, dear, 'twill spile de hull neighborhood, won't it, faather, ef it comes t'rough?"

"Yes, 'twill, no mistake. De quiet an' de cleanness'd be gone." A movement in the adjoining room interrupted the conversation. She hurried in.

Nicholas smiled a welcome.

"How long have I been sick, Mrs. Van Voorhies?"

"A leetle more'n a month."

He regarded her anxiously.

She trembled, fearing the questions which would doubtless now begin to follow with troublesome rapidity.

"Have I been unconscious as long as that?"

"Woll, not 'xactly, but you've ben det weak — you wus wery low, Nickie, but de doctor say you're goin' to

git well now, right along — det most o' de time you lay jes' stupid an' heavy."

There was a long pause.

"Is — father — dead? Is — it — true?" His eyes were searching.

She dropped hers. Her voice was very tender. "It's true, Nickie."

A deep groan escaped his lips.

"It's time fer your milk — past time — I'm a-gittin' careless, now you're better." She bustled out, only to lean against the wall and bury her face in her apron. "Poor leetle feller," she kept saying to herself. "I wish I c'd bear it fer him."

He did not ask further questions for several days. He seemed contented to lie still.

One spring morning, when the weather was so mild that the upper half of the broad green door in the living-room was let swing open, and the fresh, pleasing fragrance of grass and new-ploughed earth filled the atmosphere, Nicholas tottered out of his sick-chamber and took the farmer's big chair, which Caty Ann had filled with pillows. He was emaciated and pallid, but the unmistakable look of returning health was in his eye and the energy of his expression.

It was the hour before dinner, and with her preparations well ahead, Caty Ann was at leisure. She was beginning to get anxious as well as curious over a pile of letters which had accumulated to formidable dimensions.

With returning strength, a restless desire had stolen over Nicholas to make a connection with life. "Are there letters for me, Mrs. Van Voorhies; at least, have you thought to inquire when you have gone to Klacs?"

She brought the pile with eager gratification.

He looked over the addresses leisurely, setting several aside with a flush of wonder and curiosity.

"I hain't told you before, Nicholas, det when you was de wust, a minister from York come up to see you twice. He wus det Mr. Catherwood what teach'd de deestric school here. Sech a prayer es he made over you, Nick!" She wiped her eyes. "An' Mis' Dutton, she come wid him de last time — quite grand like, wid

furs an' a fash'nable bunnit — but de same Mis' Dutton. I took a fresh fancy to her. She cried over you like a baby. An' after dese visits, de letters begin to come. You must a made quite a place fer yourself in York, Nickie. I feel raal proud of you."

Perhaps language less simple would have failed at this time to convey the fact of friendship strong enough to go out of its way to care for him. Caty Ann's tribute to his good standing, moreover, was delicious.

"Well, I believe there is a handful of people who care a little for me, but who has given me her home and a mother's care, bringing me up out of the valley of the shadow of death?" His voice was reverent.

"'Twan't not'in', Nickie. I wus jes' a-dyin' fer sompin' to pet. My man an' Ike's both strong an' well, an' you see you jes' give me a chance!"

"I shall never forget it, Mrs. Van Voorhies, never! And to think you helped carry my big frame out of that deserted house."

"Woll, I never! Do you t'ink I'd a lef' you dere to freeze to death, fer want o' an extry pair o' hands? It wus raal warmin' work, good fer us all. Det turned out to be de coldest night o' de winter."

By a natural reversion, the current of his thought set towards Saskia.

Caty Ann saw the look in his eyes, saw his shrinking hesitation, and, aware that at last the question for which she had been waiting was trembling on his lips, felt overcome with embarrassment and sympathy, and, rising precipitately, made a great ado about dinner, leaving him to read his letters in peace.

Nicholas had not expected Saskia to come to see him. He was aware that, by a kind of reflex action, she would transfer her own shortcomings to his shoulders, considering his inability to leave the neighborhood an additional grievance. But he had wondered at the absence of her name from the most casual conversation, and a vague uneasiness, as much as he was capable of, in his present condition, agitated him. He had been discerning enough, also, to see that Caty Ann was evading the question she saw trembling on his lips. Did she know it related to Saskia? He resolved to suppress his anxiety a day or two longer, and, in the meantime, to answer his more

pressing letters. There were several to quicken the hope born of healthful convalescence.

One was from the professor of biology at Columbia, congratulating him on the notice which a paper he had read before the National Society of Natural Science was attracting. Another was from a famous German, inviting correspondence, and still a third informed him that he was the recipient of a degree from an English university.

His profession at once assumed more definite shape, and he felt the dignity of recognized achievement. Oh, if he could only spend a few years abroad in travel, study, and association with the scientists to whom his thesis would now make him welcome. It was of no use! His scanty funds admitted of but short journeys and long stays in quiet places where the best he could hope for was the upbuilding which change of air and absence of all demand would accomplish. And sometime, in some way, there was his debt of gratitude, and a glad one, to repay to Caty Ann.

One afternoon, not long after, and while Mrs. Van Voorhies had gone to Klacs, he saw his opportunity.

In the intervals between hauling stone, Eben Van Tassel lent his neighbors a helping hand, and he was now engaged in putting Mrs. Van Voorhies' kitchen garden and flower beds in order.

Nicholas sauntered towards the spot where already rhubarb as well as jonquils and tulips were sticking their heads above ground.

Thrusting his spade into the dark loam, Eben came forward, a mixture of respect and familiarity in his manner.

"I've heern tell of the hard fight you've hed," he said, wringing the convalescent's hand till it ached, "and 'tain't me alone, but it's the hull neighborhood what's reji'cin' thet you've pulled through an' come into your own."

Nicholas looked at him steadily. What did he mean?

The quarryman spat on his hands, rubbing them together. "They git tender in the winter. What you a-goin' to do wid the farm, or hain't you got es fur es thet?"

"The farm is not mine, Eben," he replied simply, but there was a deep furrow between his brows.

"Oh, yes, 'tis. Thar's ben a lot o' disputin' 'bout it, whether 'twas or whether 'twan't. But Saskia hain't left no will, an' it's yours, fair an' square. L'yyer Boscawen telled me thet, only yist'day."

Nicholas felt his head turn, but commanded himself.

"I haven't heard the particulars about Saskia. I haven't been strong enough. But I am in trim to hear now. Suppose you tell them, Eben, right here — and be as brief — as you can."

"I hope I ain't ben the one to let the cat out'n the bag?"

"Go right on. If you don't tell me, somebody else will — and to-day." He braced himself against the stone wall surrounding the garden.

"Thar ain't much to tell. I s'pose you've heerd 'bout old Vroom, how he set in his cheer by the fire an' Saskia called him to supper, an' when he didn't come, she jes' went up to him an' giv' his shoulder a jerk, an' he fell all in a heap out'n his chair — dead! You've heern thet, hain't you?"

"Yes — I have," said Nicholas, using some sophistication.

"Woll, it 'pears he left ev'ryt'ing in his will bound fast an' tight to Peter. When Saskia found it out, she went tearin' 'round, sayin' she'd brek thet will, she would. An' while she wus a-goin' on, she hed a fit — a new kind, I sh'uld t'ink, from the queer name Dr. Vliet giv' it. Some kind of a tic fit, 'tanyrate. An' she never comed out'n it, an' she died then an' thar. She wus buried t'ree weeks ago come Friday — an' the day wus the second coldest of the winter — an' March et thet. Thet's all there is. I hain't told it very well. I hope I hain't done no mischief."

"No, Eben — and thank — you. I would rather have heard it just so. I will go into the house, if you will excuse me."

He walked away, his head bowed.

"Woll, woll, woll!" said Eben, watching the tall, emaciated figure disappear. "How quiet he tuk it. Who could a thought thet eny of us fellers hed it in him to turn out sech a gentleman! Thar's hopes fer us all." He drew himself up, a touch of pride in his step, as he returned to the spading.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Mrs. Dutton and Susanna actually turned their faces towards the farm, it was with mingled dread and anticipation.

The tide of reminiscence, rising to the flood, overwhelmed the old lady.

The younger woman feared lest memories at once romantic and prosaic should forever lose their bloom; but the force of youth and an affectionate and steadfast nature asserted themselves as soon as she found herself riding from the station over the white, shaly turnpike, the mountains on one side, the wide stretch of fertile uplands on the other, the landscape glowing with the cheerful variety of ripening harvests blended with patches of woodland. The soft wind came scented with odors indescribably delicate and delicious. Peace was in the very atmosphere. Whatever was sordid, blighting, or narrowing in the farm-life was hidden out of sight under the blue skies flecked with clouds idly sailing aloft as if time were of no account.

As they passed one familiar landmark after another, a lump rose in Susanna's throat, and a sudden ecstasy of joy seized her on beholding the gray, weather-worn gable of her early home heave into sight like a ship on the horizon. Getting out of the carriage, as they reached their own boundaries, she walked, with long, free, eager steps through the grass along the road.

Celinda had gone on ahead a few days, and now stood in the doorway of the parlor to welcome them.

When Susanna reached the steps, she found that one was gone, and a rampant tangle of weeds and vines doing its best to wedge apart the others. But even decay has a debonair aspect in summer, and, springing over the uncertain footing, she gained the well-remem-

bered plateau, abloom with flowers in its best estate, but now a veritable pitfall of depressions, threatening to let her through at any moment into MacDuffy's cellar.

"Are you sure the path is safe enough for grand-mamma?" she inquired, as the colored woman advanced to meet her.

"Yes'm, it's safe — long es you keep in de middle. I'se ben a-stompin' on it an' tryin' it over an' over. But I can't speak fer de aidges."

"All right. Go and help grandmamma over that broken step. I can't wait another minute to cross this sill."

She went inside with eager, tender curiosity. The windows were up; the fireboard was down, and a pile of cones were laid ready for lighting. But, notwithstanding the waves of summer fragrance sifting in from out of doors, there was a sooty smell from the chimney and a vague incense odor of mustiness and old furniture.

How small and meagre the windows looked! How stained and cracked and impending the whitewashed ceiling was, after all! And was that narrow, high shelf the mantel on which the candelabra, joy and pride of her childhood, had stood? How little and low the doors leading into the bedrooms were! Weren't the rooms larger? Why, how had they ever gotten along?

Lifting the latch of the door opening on the attic stairs, she began their ascent, a docile spirit as of childhood sweeping over her.

A swarm of wasps was circling in front of the open window. Herbs, gathered years before, swung from the rafters, ghostly bundles of twigs with every leaf gone. The thought of former occupancy, former possession, fled. She tried to, but could not seize again the vivid sense of those bygone times. Nothing, really, was left of them but ghosts, as there was nothing left of the herbs.

She gazed out of the gable window. There were no storms in the neighborhood now. And they were such a big, palpable fact a few years ago. She thought of Nicholas — in France, by this time, and an alien like herself to early associations.

In looking back over those monotonous months and years, she wondered how she had lived such a period of

time, contented, tranquil. She began to pick out, here and there, as one does from a winter landscape, beauties in her childhood. Still, it remained true that the beauties were scattered, while her young womanhood, like the first days of summer, burned with ardors enchanting to all the senses. Ah, how glad, how glad she was, that she knew now what that great world was which such a little while ago seemed as vague, as unreachable, as undesirable — as heaven!

She ran down-stairs — she was Miss Kildare again.

Mrs. Dutton had sunk into the first chair by the door. Her bonnet strings were untied. Celinda stood fanning her. The tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"How melancholy it is!" she said, putting her handkerchief to her eyes. "What possessed us to come!"

"It is only for a week, grandmamma. Don't feel so blue. You are thinking of mamma and Janey, I know. Everything will look different by to-morrow. And, besides, there is nothing to keep us, if we don't want to stay. Oh, see how large these locusts are at the back of the house! They and I have grown up together. Have you anything for us to eat, Celinda?"

"Yaas'm; it'll be a picnic dinner, but dem's de best kind, sometimes."

"Here, grandmamma, take my arm, and we will walk around outside — as of old."

The women looked out of keeping with their surroundings, as, arm in arm, they ventured cautiously down the path they had so often trodden before. It almost seemed as if there were a look of reproach on the part of the house, falling rapidly into decay. It seemed to ask why it had not received a share of their good fortune in the way of paint and blinds and other paraphernalia of improvement.

The next morning, with the swift reaction of age, Mrs. Dutton decided to stay a month. Susanna smiled, but expected another change of opinion in a few hours. For her own part, she was charmed to find that those elements of grandeur and simplicity which the environment afforded had a potent charm defying change or time or sadness. She wandered over the farm and reviewed each former haunt with a delicate tenderness of sentiment for a vanished past not without its æsthetic charm. The

freedom of the solitude, the wild turbulence of the creek, the continents of shadow sweeping over the mountains, the ethereal purity of the air peculiar to elevated regions, the piney sombreness and sacredness of the huckleberry knoll, the vistas under the umbrageous rows of bowery apple trees in the orchard, and the commingled hum of the insects in a Gregorian chant of sad and rhythmic melody, — how sweet, how soothing, how soul-possessing it all was!

Never before had she felt such a buoyant freedom. Oh, what a gift life was! How wonderful was creation! How adorable the Creator! "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name," she sang, to a quaint, intricate tune, full of repetitions and trills and cadences. How far away the city was! How superfluous, in the midst of such peace, such rural conditions, seemed those social problems besetting her thought night and day!

Returning through the orchard, she thought, as she had a hundred times as a girl, what a beautiful spot it would make for a home. The slope was so gracious in all directions. The creek was as soothing as the sea with its monotone of sound. The giant locusts, near by, with their long, naked, columnar trunks and feathery tops, would temper the approach with a pleasant shade.

Ever since her grandmother had given her the deed for the old farm, she had been full of building projects. Here was a chance, and on a simple scale, to carry out an idea she had been revolving.

She walked back and forth under the trees, her white gown brushing the grass with a soft swish. The delicate lace trimmings about her neck, her lace-edged, flaring sleeves, the gentle lift of her waving hair, as the breeze swept up in fitful gusts from the south, made her look the embodiment of freedom. There was about her, as about all powerful personalities, the suggestion of an ample self-sufficiency, the farthest removed from conceit and arrogance.

And now, as she walked back and forth under the apple trees, the earth as beautiful as Paradise, and the only sounds impinging on her consciousness the whisper of the breeze, the voice of the creek, and the song of birds, she felt a glad release, even if only temporary,

from those social ills which had kept growing larger and larger and uglier and uglier during her last weeks in the city. Perhaps it was because she had gone about more with Dr. MacBee. Perhaps it was because certain visits which she had made on the East side, at Mr. Catherwood's suggestion, had opened her ears to the cry of the overcrowded poor. Perhaps it was because her more intelligent vision was quicker to detect the signs of misery elbowing shoulder to shoulder with happiness even in the wealthy centre of the city—she did not know. Here it all seemed far away, vague—something that could wait.

Other thoughts stole upon her, thoughts born of the summer—instinctive, yearning, tender. She fancied what it would be to feel the clasp of a tiny hand in her own, to feel the weight of a tottering, laughing baby at her side—to clasp to her heart her own child, her very own child! Her breath came more quickly with the thought; but, suddenly, like a cloud over the sun, came the haunting, pressing picture of the white-faced babies, the hollow-eyed, thin-armed, gaunt-bodied babies in those hot, crowded tenements. Her longing became less personal, less human, more divine. It seemed to her, if she could, she would like to fold all the helpless little ones in the world to her bosom in a sheltering embrace. Something fluttered at her feet. It was a young robin, trying to stretch its wings for its first flight. The parent birds were making a great chatter of invitation and encouragement.

Gently picking up the bird, she put it on the lowest bough of the tree from which it had floundered, and, stepping off a little distance, watched it wing its way with more and more confidence from limb to limb till it had gained the nest once more.

She clasped her hands in an ecstasy of delight.

A footfall on the mountain road arrested her attention; with a mixture of surprise, pleasure, and disappointment, she beheld Peter Vroom, who had evidently seen her before, for he waved his hand, and, the next instant, sprang over the fence, advancing with a kind of gratified radiance of expression.

"I did not expect to see you up in this wilderness," he exclaimed.

"And I thought we had absolutely severed all connections."

"Have I broken the charm?"

"You have at least dispelled my illusion. But what an enchanting spot we grew up in, Peter! I never half realized it before."

"I watched that pastoral episode with the bird. It got back, didn't it?"

She shook her head with fond gratification. "It was perfectly delightful to see the joy of the father and mother bird. I wish we could get some of those unfortunate parents on the East side up here for an object lesson, don't you? Sometimes the birds seem more human than humanity — the duties are so exactly divided between the fathers and mothers."

"H'm — yes," said Peter, as if anything even remotely didactic were the furthest from his inclination. "What brought you back?"

"Grandmamma wanted to see the old place again."

"You won't stay long!"

"I think, myself, we are likely to take wing any day; but do not let us project the future here; it is too elysian."

"You wouldn't talk that way if you were stopping up at my place. I want to sell it, and I have been making an inventory. I feel fairly smothered with clothing and linen. I have been going over the accumulations of generations. And all I can think of is a lot of grubs spinning their own cocoons. There are two great chests of sheets and pillow-cases, one packed tight with yarn stockings knit by my mother and grandmother, and others filled with home-spun counterpanes, etc. There are twenty in all, standing in grim files in the attic, labelled, and dated like coffins. Give me the city with its jingle and sparkle, its hotels and theatres, its tide of people rising and falling each day like that of the ocean. And to my way of thinking, you look as unreal under these trees, with that dilapidated gray house close at hand, as I feel, to be back under the shadow of these mountains."

"I am part of that old house," she said, with some pride and more firmness. "There my mother died, and there we loved and lost little Janey. I couldn't think

of myself apart from that old house. I am more Dutch than you are, Peter, in my allegiance."

"I like you all the better for it," he said gloomily.

Perceiving that he would willingly forego his memories, she relented towards his invasion and invited him to dinner.

He stayed the entire afternoon, and she realized, long before he left, and with a rising regret, that she was being cornered into situations the tenderness of which, on his part, she found it impossible to evade.

The day was warm, and he proposed carrying chairs into the hollow back of the west window, under the locust trees.

She consented, reluctantly, foreseeing the inevitableness of a tête-à-tête wherever she remained; for Mrs. Dutton, overcome by the change of air, had slept ever since dinner.

But when she found herself alone with Peter in that little cup of greenness suggesting a greater isolation than really existed, a strange, new feeling of separation from him stole over her, and Catherwood was presented to her consciousness with vivid force.

She experienced a tremor of mingled exultation and dismay. She reached forth her hands in an eager, abandoned manner, as if about to fall, and then pressed them against her eyes. It was the instinctive effort of a hitherto unpinioned spirit to sweep away those mystical fetters which chain the body but release the heart. A thrill both of helplessness and power sung through her nerves, and she paused absent-mindedly while Peter adjusted her chair. As he turned it at what he thought she would consider precisely the right angle, he glanced towards her.

"My God, Susanna, how splendid you are!"

She raised her eyes in confused bewilderment, and he drank in her beauty with a greedy delight which she perceived but did not feel.

"I have had such a strange experience," she said, almost as if talking in her sleep. "Everything suddenly seemed so large, so vast, so unreal."

"I guess the heat has made you dizzy," said the matter-of-fact Peter. "Sit down here and let me fan you."

She sank into the high-back rocker, her full white

skirts falling in ample folds on either side, her jewelled hands resting, with a suggestion of weariness, in her lap.

Gradually reacting to the present situation, she maintained an aloofness which Peter inevitably misunderstood. From his first recollection of her, there had been a certain active defensiveness in her manner towards him, and only rarely had he been permitted to witness the acquiescent gentleness which now enveloped her attitude, her expression, which was noticeable in the very tones of her voice.

His golden opportunity had come, at last! and he found himself leisurely regarding their rural surroundings as his abettor. The glamour of the mountains, of the mellow light under those delicate acacia leaves, of the profusion of sweet, wild scents augmenting and diminishing with each coming and passing breeze, the auspicious solitude of a summer afternoon in which their seclusion promised to be so continued and complete, stole over his senses in coarser ways, and something of the same energy of pursuit seized him that characterized his attitude as a boy towards her.

He was troubled by no thought of worthiness or unworthiness. He beheld a magnificent incarnation of health and beauty, and the fierce instinct of possession swept over him with brutal, passionate force. This woman was to be his; she would be called his wife; she would bear his name. He would wear her beauty and enjoy it with barbaric pomp and lustiness. He would be willing to exalt her as the people of Tyre exalted Ashtaroth. He would flaunt her before his public as some men do their horses.

Not that Peter analyzed his intentions in this fashion as he sat beside her, longing, but not quite daring, to touch her dress, to lift one of those strong, white hands and examine it with luxurious pleasure. But he was pre-eminently a man of instincts, not sentiments, of powerful volition which had been crowned thus far by material success, and his pleasure was his duty, and when the pleasure ceased, the duty ended.

They talked idly and with a careful avoidance of argument on all sorts of subjects; sometimes silences intervened which she felt powerless to break and from whose depths of meaning, as he interpreted them, the young man was loth to emerge.

As the first long shadow fell like an index finger pointing towards the night, he roused himself to ask the question which she had set aside or parried on other occasions, but never under like circumstances.

He had drawn his chair nearly in front of her as they talked on, and now, as he sat slightly bent forward, his hands clasped between his knees, his head bowed with a lover's thought and a lover's perplexity in finding just the right word, she looked at him with a kind of motherly tolerance of his limitations, joined to a genuine respect for what he had made of himself and his affairs. She thought, with an inward smile, of the night so long ago, when, as an inexperienced girl, he had wrought upon her to a somewhat dangerous extent, and she drew a long, grateful sigh that destiny had not tripped her in her youthful folly and spoiled her life.

The sigh gave Peter courage, and he seized her hands with a restrained vehemence of ardor that she could not instantly resist. She seemed powerless to be, or appear to be, a woman of moods. She could neither throw aside nor veil the brooding gentleness she felt for the whole world.

"Don't send me back up the hill to-night without some hope in my heart." His face was very near. She felt his breath on her cheek.

"It is a lonesome, gruesome place, and I am sorry for you, Peter — very sorry."

He pressed her hands.

She tried to draw them away, reluctant to deny him in words. She was passing through one of the few moments of her life when her grasp of a situation seemed obscure and faltering. If Peter could feel, if he had ever felt, a tenth of what had surcharged her whole being so tremendously, this day, why, how tender, how exquisitely tender a woman should be in her treatment of a man under similar circumstances.

His eyes met hers; never had she appeared so womanly and so regal. Their light, their glorious depths and calmness agitated him profoundly.

"Why do you make it so hard for me, Peter?" she began reproachfully. "Can't you see, can't you feel — that I —"

A dread of the positive thing she might be going to

say, rather than a knowledge of it, swept down upon him with appalling force. "I won't press you further now — don't, don't — I'll wait. It wasn't fair to take you unawares — when you came up here to be alone. I'll wait till you go back home in the autumn. Good heavens, Susanna, to feel as I feel at this moment is a terrible thing!"

He sprang to his feet. He was very pale. He walked back and forth a few times in the checkered light now falling with a deep, golden mellowness across the thin, fine grass under the trees. He paused, irresolute. She had never seen him so agitated, so supremely natural and unreserved.

"I think I will go home. How can I go and leave you!" He stepped away from her with an imploring fierceness, as if asking her to save herself from him.

The great stress of his emotion recalled her to herself. She rose, clasping the back of her chair, her hand showing like polished ivory. She looked as cold and as pale as her native mountains in midwinter.

He thought he had incurred her displeasure by his display of feeling.

"I have offended you. Forgive me, Susanna. I never knew myself till this hour. Only say that you forgive me. Leave everything else till — till we meet in the city." He held out his hand in desperate entreaty.

She took it. There was no life in her clasp. Her fingers were trembling.

"Good night, Peter," she said, with great gentleness, but dignity. "I have nothing to forgive."

He turned away abruptly.

She heard him walk up the hill with quick, sharp steps. She buried her face in her hands, overwhelmed with feeling, but the feeling was not for him. Like a planet wrested a moment from its course, she swung back with a passionate joy of deliverance to the orbit of which Catherwood was the centre.

CHAPTER X

ON the first morning of his vacation, Catherwood went to the Dutton house immediately after breakfast, to ascertain Susanna's address.

The woman in charge produced a slip of paper from which, in Miss Kildare's bold chirography, the minister read a name that set his pulses throbbing with the relaxation that imagination gives to thought after long-continued tension. He had never been at Boulder Cliff, but, all the same, he saw the rocky headlands. He saw ledges and heathery downs and clumps of wild rose still abloom in isolated spots. He saw the great arch of the sky tranquilly clear in the long twilight. He saw Susanna standing on the cliff, the breeze fluttering her dress and browning her cheek and deepening the splendor of her beauty.

Once on the train, he surrendered himself to fancy and expectation. Earlier in the season, he had revelled in the thought of his delight in the grass, the foliage, the song of birds, the beauty of growing things, on the first day he should feel free to step forth out of the great city. But as he gazed idly from the car window now, it was neither town nor inlet nor venerable homestead burrowing in a clump of century-old trees—it was forever Susanna who glided outside that window, a creature of unwearied motion, never receding, never advancing beyond his ken.

Reaching Boulder Cliff, he went to his hotel, where he tried to eat a hasty dinner; but appetite had failed. Remembering her fastidiousness, he lingered long enough to make a careful toilet and started out to hunt her up. He walked down a wide, interminable thoroughfare lined with beautiful places set far back from the street, each embowered in hedges and vines and, with their hanging

baskets, fountains, and stretches of velvety lawn, looking like nests for a tropical population. He finally stopped before a granite gateway, on which, in the gleam of a street-lamp, he read the number he carried.

A touch of the weariness he had felt the previous day, preliminary to his morning sermon, crept over him. He had never before known so intimately the meaning of a lassitude which paralyzed.

Lifting the latch of a broad, wooden gate, he walked leisurely along a wide, hedge-bordered path, beyond which showed in the clear starlight the shapes of flower beds, the graceful groupings of trees, winding drives, and, in the near distance, the pale gleam of the sea. The moist air, saturated with the fragrance of honey-suckle, soothed and exhilarated him at once.

As he approached the house, he saw a broad veranda faintly illuminated by Japanese lanterns hung in the vines. There were people sitting on the veranda. He strained his ears to hear her voice. Was that she in the white dress, back there in the sweet gloom?

He ascended the steps, announced himself to a young man rising to meet him, and inquired for Miss Kildare. He felt sure that the white presence in shadow would at once come forward. The whole place looked so like Susanna.

"Miss Kildare!" replied the young man. "Mrs. Dutton and Miss Kildare left four days ago, but I can give you their address. Mother, the Rev. Dr. Catherwood. Fanny, this is the minister of whom Mrs. Dutton talked so much."

Catherwood made himself agreeable for a half-hour, and left. On the way back to the hotel, he reacted. He ordered a substantial supper, slept dreamlessly for ten hours, and awoke just in time to catch the express to New York. His eagerness, but not the intensity of his pursuit, had subsided.

Arriving in the city in time, he took the night boat up the Hudson. As he passed the Palisades, darkening in the evening gloom, and swung out into one of those stately bays which the river fashions before the Highlands come into view, near and tender and very gentle thoughts of Susanna, the little child, the unformed, promising girl, gave him a kind of sweet possession of

her even as a woman. How well he knew her! Daughter of a hundred kings in blood, she was such in reality. A swirl of retrospection carried him back through those long periods of history during which her ancestors in nearly every kingdom in Europe had ruled as kings, or nobles, or lawgivers in church and state. He thought, with a certain proud fondness, of chapters in colonial and revolutionary history, during which his forefathers and hers had stood shoulder to shoulder in council, in war, in peace; and here they two were, the product of the centuries, with a favorable heredity of power, character, and mentality, placed in conditions new to the world — they, heirs of the ancients, part and parcel of a so-called new people, and under conditions to exercise a marked influence if it were in them to do it. His blood warmed, his heart throbbed. Oh, what could he not be, what could he not do, if she were a part of his being, the light of his life, inspirer, counsellor, companion, wife!

It was midnight when he went to his cabin. Roused by the unloading of freight at daybreak, he went on deck.

The Catskills gazed down upon him with a grand and motherly familiarity.

An hour later the last load of freight and he left the boat together.

That serene feeling of leisure possessing a person approaching his goal under pleasant conditions, and when the future contains at least some promise of success, animated Catherwood.

Seeking the tavern, whose shabby exterior belied its actual accommodations, and where he had often in the past been sheltered, he ate breakfast, while his host volunteered the gossip of the region.

"I've heern tell that old Mr. Storm left a bigger heap of ready money than nobuddy hed any idee of. They say Nick's quit work an' gone to Europe."

Catherwood nodded. "I went to the steamer with him myself. He expects to be gone three years at least."

"You don't say so! Woll, that's the way usially with the youngsters. The old uns scrape an' save an' the young uns spend. Peter Vroom stopped here two or three days ago. He's up now inventor'in'. He's goin' to have a vandue."

Catherwood's countenance fell. He despised Peter,

but he had a man's irritable consciousness of the young Dutchman's fine proportions. A fleeting fear clutched him, but he banished it as unworthy of Susanna, and, from a certain pride withal, of which he was hardly conscious, in his own general equipment, compared with that of Vroom. And there was Vroom's business. A woman of her training and New England antecedents could never tolerate that. Nevertheless, his buoyancy diminished to such an extent that after he had paid his bill and gone out to examine the buggy he had engaged till he chose to bring it back, the landlord followed him with the scrutinizing keenness of perception which makes the curiosity of a country man at once baffling and annoying.

The minister got in, took the reins, and was about to drive on, when the old man laid a hand on the dashboard. "I fergot to tell yer that the widder Dutton an' her grandarter come up mebbe four days ago, intendin' to stay a spell."

He leaned forward. The landlord blinked sleepily, his countenance growing smoother, and expectorated with great deliberation.

"Eben Van Tassel, he stopped in this mornin' to say he heerd tell they wus gone a'ready, but he said he didn't b'lieve it, 'cause the smoke wus comin' out'n the chimney as he druv past, an' all the winders wus wide open."

Catherwood let the lines fall limp, but he looked his companion steadily in the eyes. The landlord took his hand from the dashboard, the minister nodded, touched the horse, and was gone.

"You ain't kep' your secret no better'n the rest of them," soliloquized his host, standing in the street and watching the retreating buggy. "I declar' to gosh I'd like to know which one on you'll git her, I would. Ef I hedn't ben so chicken-hearted, I'd a told you, too, of the other feller what's ben up."

The morning was heavenly, and, after the great heat of the city, the fresh fragrance of the atmosphere was soothing and delightful. Catherwood drove along at a leisurely pace, with a growing, vagrant pleasure in his freedom. He had quite resigned himself to the possibilities of disappointment when the old gray house came in sight.

The gable seen from a distance was non-committal at the best, with its one attic window like a centaur's eye dominating the approach. A curtain was fluttering over the sill. Some one must be there, at all events.

He was not left in doubt as he came up; for Celinda stood with arms akimbo in the lower doorway, the clumps of rose bushes on either side making a not unbecoming setting to her dark skin.

"Hello, Celinda, are you opening the house or shutting it up?"

"I declar', Mr. Catherwood," she exclaimed, walking towards the buggy apologetically, "I'se 'shamed to tell you I'se shettin' up jes's fast es I kin. De folks left yist'day. But do git out an' let me give you some dinner. Dere's lots here, all ready, an' bof you'n yore hawse needs some rest on sech a hot day. Could you manage yo'self to turn de hawse out'n de garden a spell while I hustle things on de table fer you?"

Catherwood was compliance itself; for he was bent on extracting from Celinda, before leaving, whatever information she carried in her discreet bosom.

On coming back to the house, he found the table already set near the open door and laden with a supply of food sufficient for a Persian after the fast of Ramadan. Pie and cake, blackberries, corn-cakes, boiled eggs, cold chicken, and coffee were ranged around his plate in inviting profusion. He ate with an avidity apparently fascinating to the black woman, for she lingered near, after all excuse for waiting upon him had ceased. He had thus far asked no questions. He was creating an atmosphere. Finally, despairing of the satisfaction to be obtained from parrying inquiries, she began, herself, to talk.

"Mis' S'anna didn't hev de peace she 'spected. She hain't ben let alone a single minute."

"I don't understand," he said indifferently.

"Well, you see, de fust day, young Mr. Vroom, he come down in de mawnin' an' pestered her all day. Mis' Dutton, she wus so tuckered out wid de heat an' not feelin' strong dat she slep' de hull afternoon, an' poor Mis' S'anna had de hull 'sponsibility of entertainin' him." Celinda tilted her head pathetically, casting an oblong glance at the minister.

"I s'pose you'd call Mr. Vroom a mighty han'some young man, wouldn't you, Mr. Catherwood?"

"I suppose so."

"An' den de second mawnin', Mis' Dutton, she got awful lonesome all on a sudden an' wus so sot on goin' right off agin dat Mis' S'anna walked all de way to Klacs to send a telegram 'bout 'ceptin' an invitation that comed de night before."

"Where?"

She ignored the question. "An' she'd no sooner got back, than Mr. Hillerton, he druv up, jes' es you've ben a-doin', an' he stayed de hull afternoon an' to supper an' till jes' time to drive to de ribber fer de midnight train. Yist'day mawnin', Mis' Dutton, she got raal cross, she did, 'cause de privacy wus, as she said, so invaded. An' Mis' S'anna, she tramped de ole farm over a-sayin' good by an' feelin' bad to go away, an' las' night dey took de boat back to New York."

Catherwood's lips twitched. He had wakened on hearing the dash of the paddle-wheels of the returning boat, and had watched her lights as she glided past, without a single tender premonition of Susanna's nearness.

"I hope they are not going to stay long in New York in such weather as this," he said, with a fine carelessness.

"Oh, laws, no. Dey aire jes' a-goin' back to git proper dresses fer whar dey's a-goin' visitin'."

He looked up, and his glance was now sufficiently imploring to melt Celinda.

"I don' know es I ought ter tell, an' I wouldn't, only I hear Mis' Dutton say dat ef it'd a ben Mr. Catherwood a-poppin' down on dem so onceremonious, she wouldn't a cared a bit." Again Celinda's eyes beamed with a suggestive friendliness.

"And — and — do you think Miss Susanna would have been able to bear with me as well as with the others?"

"She'd b'ar wid anybody, Mr. Catherwood, Mis' S'anna would, she's so good-natured."

"Well, tell me where she's gone and I will try her."

"It's in Mis' Dutton's ole state — in Connect'cut. De place is Stonebury, an' dey're goin' to visit Mis' Gerald."

He looked very serious, for Susanna, a visitor at such an elaborate establishment, seemed relegated to difficult

regions. But remembering that the Geraldts had attended his church several times, his hope returned. Besides, he knew Stonebury, knew the hotel there, and that its accommodations were ample enough and the Berkshire country coming into sufficient notoriety for his stay to occasion no remark — and stay he meant to, as long as Miss Kildare's visit continued.

"Well, Celinda," he said, rising and fumbling in his pocket for a bill, "I have had a first-rate dinner, and I feel a hundred per cent better. Here is a present with which to buy yourself a new bonnet."

She followed him to the garden, fetching a pail of water up from the creek for the horse, and lingering beside the minister till he was ready to start.

He held out his hand, and while she took it with a great show of reverence and humility, she said, "I don't know es I ought to tell, but Mis' S'anna's ben a-readin' yore book of sermons — but she say she don't agree wid no more'n half you say."

"Half is a great deal from some people."

"Dat's so. An' Mis' S'anna, she ain't de agreein' kind, you know, Mr. Catherwood, she ain't. She don't always agree wid herself. Agreein' ain't never no sign." Celinda giggled musically.

He smiled appreciatively, touched the whip to his horse, and started back at an easy pace down the white road over which the heat was now dancing in waves of dizzying brilliancy.

CHAPTER XI

THE day on which the weekly paper went to press, Catherwood reached Stonebury, and he had consequently been at Hotel Eaglewood but a few hours before the Gerald's were aware of the fact. Mrs. Gerald had been disappointed in making up the house party she had intended to have meet Susanna, and his arrival, therefore, was her opportunity. Moreover, she had come under the spell of his eloquence and magnetism as well as that nameless other spell — a rising reputation.

The following morning, as he was descending the long steps of the hotel porch to a grove of elms, through which a drive leading from the village street circled, a victoria approached. The coachman's box hid the occupants for a minute, but the next instant, he beheld Mrs. Gerald and Susanna.

It would be difficult to say who was more pleased with the encounter, Mrs. Gerald or he. But each was prepared for the situation, while Susanna, disappointed at their failure to arrive and leave Mrs. Gerald's card unseen, became immediately invested with a reserve as cool as the appearance of her lilac and white gown.

"This is delightful, Mr. Catherwood, and really too good to be true. I will not have it said that you stopped at a hotel when I was in Stonebury. You must let me send for your traps."

"Thank you, Mrs. Gerald, thank you very much. But suppose we compromise. I am very much of a bachelor, you know, and I should feel more at ease to keep my quarters here, although I can promise to give you the lion's share of my time. How near is your place?"

"Why, it is about a mile out of the village!"

"Capital! I can walk back and forth a dozen times a

day, if it is only that distance. How is Mrs. Dutton, Miss Kildare?"

"Grandmamma is usually well, thank you." She looked up to meet his inquiry, and she saw the other question in his eyes — whether the situation would be acceptable to her. Her head swayed slightly, so great was her struggle to preserve a merely friendly greeting, but strength and power, and that luminous intensity with which he held audiences and gained moral supremacy, were in his expression. There was also in his manner and his present absorption in her wish that full leisure to pay attention to her which she had so often missed. The last few weeks became obliterated, and she gave him a radiant smile.

"I will dine with you this evening, Mrs. Gerald, with your permission. I shall be busy through the day in bringing up the correspondence which I found waiting for me here."

"I will send William with the dog-cart for you at six. We dine at seven."

They drove away, Catherwood watching the flutter of their draperies in the breeze, and feeling a sudden forlornness and homesickness as they disappeared from view. He had never seen Susanna under similar circumstances, and it was with mingled curiosity, elation, and impatience that he waited for the long hours of the day to pass.

But at length he was in the dog-cart beside William, bowling down a street unrivalled in New England for its breadth, its grassy cloisters between ancient elms, its ample homesteads bearing dates of their erection, and standing in an English privacy of seclusion.

He had heard much about Mrs. Gerald's charm as a hostess, but, just now, he thought chiefly of her as his great opportunity.

The day had been a breathless one of August, when the summer stands motionless between the breezy warmth and growth of July and the fitful temperateness of September. The sun hung in the west like a ball of red-hot iron. A bluish haze was over the landscape, and the fields had the burnt, velvety look of gathered harvests. The branches of the trees drooped like the arms of runners at the end of a long course.

The motion of the cart produced a faint breeze, and Catherwood took off his hat to get what benefit he could from the little air stirring.

"Here's Windshelter, sir," said William, with some pride, as they came abreast of a low, broad granite wall extending a long distance down the road.

"It is a pretty place. Some one who loved nature and knew how to make the most of her just as she is, chose this spot for a home."

"Yes, sir, he did. Mr. Gerald could a built atop the hill where's a grand view, but also a regular stoneheap. And so he hed this gradual slope to the road graded a bit and filled in a bit, and it's made the most homelike spot fer miles around. It's a fine variety of the hombly and the beautiful spread before his eye as he sits on his piazzas. If you'd notice, sir, there's first a couple o' acres o' lawn sweepin' up agin the hill on one side and down to this wall on the other. Beyond the lawn you will observe a big field kept jest fer meadow, and next to that comes the kitchen garden, and hothouses, and conservatories, and last the farm-house and barns. It is a spot to the liking of a gentleman and a farmer in one. And there's ever so much more than the eye takes in at a first glance. That's like Mr. Gerald, too. Behind the house there's a long, winding drive, then a fine grove, and a road built up the hill, where Mrs. Gerald likes to go a-rusticatin' with the city people, a-pickin' ferns, and settin' beside the brook, and comin' out finally where the stables are — one of the sights around here, sir."

The visitor perceived the attitude of the family towards the place in the coachman's description; he felt he should like Mr. Gerald immensely.

William now turned into a drive flanked on either side by green tubs filled with blooming hydrangeas, and the house, a low stone structure with enormously wide porches, came into view.

As Catherwood drove up, Mr. and Mrs. Gerald with Mrs. Dutton stood ready to receive him.

He was immediately at home, and, like most ministers, shut away for a time to solitude, the habit of his life asserted itself, and he was soon in a great flow of talk. The other guests appeared one by one, and he perceived

that the house party was sufficiently large for Susanna to evade him if she should wish to do so.

She came down-stairs as dinner was announced, and, after her greeting, they were almost immediately separated. At dinner, he had the pleasing solace of sitting at one end of the table the farthest possible diagonally removed from her at the other end.

He had never seen her dressed as she was this night, and he appreciated what a maddening thing the mere beauty of a woman might be. He held himself in check one moment with a kind of monastic fear, and the next challenged his patristic readings with the unspoken assertion that God could not have made such beauty to conceal it. He experienced a feeling of triumph, presently, in finding himself admiring the exquisite contour of Susanna's neck and arms with an impersonal and æsthetic regard. The minister perceived, with a kind of mute wonder at the lateness of his discovery, that it is man's own impurity, or rather the unfortunateness and narrowness of his training, when he fears the ivory whiteness of neck and arms as a Turk fears to look at faces not belonging to his harem, the Ottoman and the Christian alike having put the burden of a reprehensible and meretricious weakness on woman by asking her to disfigure or disguise herself.

If Catherwood had had the tastes and sentiments of an epicure, he would have realized that his summer in the slums had adapted him to an exquisite appreciation of his present surroundings. He did not touch the wines, but no one there showed a pleasanter exhilaration. He was a good talker, he had the prestige of fame and popularity, and, long before the dinner was over, Mrs. Gerald recognized him as the guest of the evening in more than name.

But, to tell the truth, he was making a tremendous effort. He was putting himself on trial before Susanna in new ways. He was proving that he could be, if he chose, a social leader—a man of parts among people who had their touch and go with the pleasant things of life. But it tried him tremendously, and when, at the end of a hot hour and a half, they sauntered forth on the verandas, he felt that it would take just a year of this sort of thing to kill him. He had thrown himself into

it with the same force that he employed on a sermon or the pursuit of a man slipping from rectitude, or the organization of his mission work on the East side.

The company fell into small groups of twos and threes, and presently he saw his chance. Susanna was left for the first time alone as she stood leaning against the stone coping of the veranda. A great, round window had been cut in the vines beside her. The harvest moon sailed in a pale blue sky. From the lowlands came the pipings of myriad frogs, and, from the near-by trees, the croaking of tree-toads. A faint breeze wafted the honeysuckle vines; the woman of his love and longing seemed embowered in fragrance.

"Walk with me down to the gates and back, Susanna."

The words were a command, but his tones were full of entreaty.

She glanced with serene deliberation through the window in the vines, put her hand out to feel if the leaves were wet with the dew, and hesitated, but from quite other reasons. She wanted to go as much as he wanted to have her.

"It can't hurt you, dear," urged Mrs. Dutton, unadvisedly, having overheard the request.

"Do you want her to take a walk, Mr. Catherwood?" inquired Mrs. Gerald. "It is a good idea. Let us all go."

Susanna saw Catherwood's lips straighten and heard the impatient sigh he stifled.

"We will start on ahead," she said soothingly.

But they were only fairly under way when the butler came running after her with a voluminous lace scarf.

Catherwood took it from his hands. "Where shall I put it?"

"On my head," bending to suit her words.

He threw the filmy thing over, drawing the long ends around under her chin, and daring to lift her face to his in doing so. He could read nothing more than a demure acquiescence in his act.

The others now came near, and, what with the patter of feet on the gravelled walk, the laughter and talk and calling back and forth, there was no chance of solitude. They gathered at the gates, apostrophizing the moon and the orchestra of frogs, and doing a lot of other silly but

delightful nothings. Then they returned in a near bevy, and Catherwood, desperate, impatient, and defeated, left at his first opportunity.

After walking a few minutes under the gigantic, urn-like elms, a steadier mood possessed him. He feasted his thought on Susanna's beauty and brilliancy, thrilling with the memory of that moment when he looked into her eyes as into a sweet, living spring. He threw up his arms. "O God, O God!" he exclaimed, in a sharp, quick whisper.

The next morning he went in search of a suitable trap for a long drive over the hills, meaning to take Susanna, if she would go with him; but, whether she would or not, he now found himself in a frame of mind demanding constant variety and activity.

There had been a heavy shower late in the night, and in clearing it had brought a change of temperature. A steady, cool wind was blowing; a touch of autumn freshness was in the air as well as in the lights and shadows chasing one another over the distant hills.

His mares proved good travellers, and he drew up in front of the Gerald veranda with a fair show of horsemanship not without its effect on the group of ladies seated there. But by this time he was well used to admiration and cordial receptions. He was not a vain man, and his perception of cause and effect was too keen for him to feel easily flattered. Moreover, he did not intend to lose any time or squander any unnecessary politeness. Like Hillerton, he could put a certain amount of business procedure even into courtship, but there the resemblance ended; for Catherwood's was a thing of pure sentiment and passion. He felt no reservations. There had been nothing in his life to make him question his right to his present aspirations, and, as nearly as it is possible in the relation of one human being to another, he worshipped Susanna.

"Have you been taking an early drive, Mr. Catherwood?" asked Mrs. Gerald, advancing down the steps and looking bouffant and airy in a pink gown, upon which, and her uncovered head, the sun beat with becoming revelations. "Shall I not order your horses sent away? Do say you have come to remain all day."

"I'll keep my promise of neighborliness later in the

morning. I am just starting out, and, at present, I am in quest of Miss Kildare."

"She was here a minute ago," looking in every direction. "There she is, coming down the hill."

"I will go after her," he said, jumping out and handing the reins to a stable boy who had come up. He waved his hand to the other ladies on the veranda with a self-excusing smile and met her well up on the slope. His manner was eager.

She paused just before he reached her, her hands full of ferns. She wore a white straw hat with a blue ribbon round it, much like his own. Her blue and white check cheviot, opening over a linen chemisette, with its high standing collar, heightened the clearness of her skin. Her cheeks were flecked with color, and the exercise had set fluttering a dozen irregular, curly tendrils about her neck and forehead.

"I have come to ask you to drive with me. The morning is so fine that I got a trap and hurried out here on an uncertainty. Please say you will come."

She caught her breath. She hardly recognized him, what with a touch of boyish abandonment in his manner and the transformation made by a suit of gray.

She had extended her hand and he was holding it in a grip that hurt. "Yes? You will?" he asked, his face bent forward, the intense earnestness of his eyes seconding his request.

"Yes, I will," she managed to say with more calmness than she felt.

He drew himself up like a prisoner receiving a reprieve. He took the ferns from her hands, and they walked towards the house with that something in the manner of each surcharged with destiny. They looked tall and handsome, free and happy.

The ladies clustered about them as they made ready to start off a few minutes later, Susanna humorously mirthful over Mrs. Dutton's transparent delight and the gossip the whole episode would set a-going. She wondered if Catherwood knew just what he was doing. It had not surprised her to see men like Vroom and Hillerton lose their head; but this was quite another thing, she said to herself, with a restricted feeling about her heart, while all the time she was fluttering her handkerchief behind

her as they rode swiftly down the drive between the hydrangeas.

"Where shall we go?" he inquired, stopping the horses midway between the granite posts at the roadside.

"Oh, to the left; I can show you a way through the woods and over the moors. I wish we could have been here when the laurels were in bloom. There are acres upon acres of them farther on."

They turned to the left, and there followed that silence of perfect enjoyment and reciprocity which so often converts friends into lovers, and is not broken without the tender constraint of tone or language brimful of a thousand meanings.

She glanced at the face so near her own. Already the pallor was softened by a thin, firm coat of tan, the lines about the cheeks and nose were less apparent, and its rugged sternness had those redeeming qualities of benignancy and manliness giving a woman the kind of confidence she desires to feel in a man.

They gradually fell into conversation, and, in a straightforward way which had both its terrors and delights of meaning to her, he told the story of his last weeks in the city, touching with delicate and significant emphasis upon his desire to see her, his disappointment over finding her gone for the summer, and his search for her as soon as his vacation had begun. His voice trembled slightly as he mentioned the final episodes. Nothing was omitted except Celinda's encouraging innuendoes. She was stirred more than she wished to be by the feeling underneath all that he said.

"I do not know whether to consider myself flattered or not," she replied, with a little laugh, in which there was, notwithstanding, a propitiatory cadence. "If you had taken all this trouble before your vacation, it would have seemed tremendous."

He smiled with a humorous perception of her objection.

"I am a one-sided man. I have been told I can do several things well—but I can't do them together. And, to speak the truth, I never knew any one except a dilettante who was good at that sort of thing. Would you like to see me such a hurdy-gurdy man?" The reins fell slack and he turned in his seat.

"I would like to think that your interest in me is a

trifle longer than your vacation. I suppose a month from now you would hardly believe, if told suddenly, that at this hour and on this day you were driving with me and trying to make me feel complimented because you wasted your leisure on me."

An ingenuous embarrassment flushed his face. "It is not as bad as that. If I haven't given you much time, you have filled my thoughts."

She shook her head. "It would be a moral impossibility with a man of your temperament. I feel sceptical."

She had become aware, as the talk grew so personal, that she could not answer nearer questions then, if he should ask them. She had certain ambitions, certain plans, and, at this moment, they loomed up with momentous importance. She was religious, she was Christian, but she was undenominational. The sensuous element in her nature was strong; pleasure influenced her imperiously. Her liking for personal freedom amounted to a sixth sense with an exquisite, high development. She felt in a heaven of present enjoyment just to be sitting beside this man, watching the steady, strong manner in which he guided the horses, hearing the tones of his voice, feeling assured that he was ready, longing to have her speak the word that would change their whole future relation. But to join her life to his; to make the issues of his life hers, which, from the nature of things, and the present constitution of society, would be her chief duty, — she had not reached a point with her own heart where the need of him, great as it was, was so supreme as that.

Catherwood knew, as she hardly could have imagined, what was passing in her mind, and he drew sufficient satisfaction from her unconscious admissions and the perception that at least no one else stood in a closer relation than his, to feel unusually happy and patient. He let her glide away from further personal talk, and they drove the rest of the morning with something of the careless exchange of confidences of old friends and yet with an undercurrent of deepening affinity.

CHAPTER XII

THE minister saw much of Susanna at Windshelter, and under varied circumstances.

Incidentally, he attached two new members to his congregation; for Mr. Gerald, fond of theological disquisition, put him through his paces to such an extent that he felt as if he were again undergoing an examination for his profession. Oddly enough, this mind-to-mind talk with a business man, who had a matter-of-fact and bald way of stating things, stirred Catherwood unpleasantly. He had to reconsider decisions and restate propositions which had lain dormant in his memory as matters settled once and forever. He was not prepared to find fault with the decisions or cavil at the propositions, but it was not agreeable to discover that their intention was greater than he had previously apprehended.

With his usual thoroughness of purpose, he made up his mind to review some of his doctrinal studies and read the Bible critically from a literary and historical standpoint. Not that he had failed to do so throughout his ministry to a certain extent, but he was chiefly a worker, chiefly a preacher, and with the acquisitive, cursory, and assimilative habit of reading less characteristic of the thinker than the orator.

His books covered an enormous range of subjects. He decided to limit his miscellaneous reading, to curtail his pursuit of general knowledge for a time, in order to dig exhaustively along lines of comparative research and deepen or clarify convictions which he considered vital.

With the trend of modern thought and criticism what it was, he saw, after these talks with Mr. Gerald, his need to compass with a more precise and acute analysis than he was at present master of, such questions as the business man asked.

Had he been a smaller man, he would have felt mortified by the perception of his deficiency. But he knew that, above and beyond any natural or acquired ability which he might possess, the secret, hitherto, of his success had been his openness to growth, as well as his earnestness, and his constant iteration of the necessity for himself and others of a daily renewing experience of a divine life feeding and sanctifying the inner life. He was simply a captain out on the high seas, and the wind which now struck his sails showed him that for the present he must tack in a new direction, while following in the main the route pursued by past generations of seamen on the ocean he was navigating.

A casuist, a scholar, a man trammelled in the slightest degree by sectarianism, could not have set his emotions and beliefs agog to the extent that Mr. Gerald had. Instinctively, he would have viewed whatever such men said as more or less skilful didacticism. But Mr. Gerald was like Nicodemus. He was a seeker after truth. He did not talk defensively; but he was a good questioner, a clear thinker, an honest inquirer.

Catherwood was a nakedly honest man. The answers he had given were unsatisfactory to himself.

He kept, however, with rather amusing literalness to the meaning of his vacation, and, while not avoiding Mr. Gerald, sought Susanna as often as practicable.

About a week after his arrival, and while walking over the lawn with her one morning, she told him that, as Mrs. Dutton was again restless, they were planning a month of travel.

"Grandmamma seems to wish to have me more and more to herself. I think we shall have to leave in a day or two," she added, "although Mrs. Gerald expected us to stay a fortnight, and I, for my part, would be so very glad to do so. We shall hope just before returning to the city to stop a few days in grandmamma's early home."

He felt as though a thunderbolt had fallen out of a clear sky. There was such a dumfounded helplessness and regret in his manner that Susanna began to add explanations which the next minute she regretted. There was no reason why they should explain their goings and comings to him. It seemed to give him a certain right

over her movements. But she looked pathetic and distressed and womanly and appealing as she continued:—

"There is a change in grandmamma. I do not think I could mention it to anybody but you. She—she is getting childish, Mr. Catherwood. Oh, how I dislike to use that term for one who has been as large and strong and stable as she. It hurts me so." She pressed her hands together. Her eyes were full of tears.

He regarded her with tender, serious gravity. "She seems much older and thinner than she did last winter."

Susanna nodded in sad confirmation.

They walked on, and it was then that she reacted against this confidence. Her spirit of defence against herself was aroused. She knew she had been losing footing ever since his arrival and on ground she had hitherto considered firm. Usually she had been her own counsellor, and she abhorred confidences.

Suddenly, inexplicably, she felt dominated by another mood—a certain feminine delight in the quiet strength of the man to whom she had unburdened herself. And was he not one of them as no one else in the world was? Had he not shared their poverty, their sorrows? Had he not been her safe, wise adviser during the long period of her school life and college life? Really, it was like talking aloud to herself to speak to him of her anxiety. If not as intimately aware of her grandmother's decline as she, he understood, perhaps, better than any one else in the world, what it meant—all of character and mentality it obscured.

"I am glad I have spoken to you," she said, her tone a confession of her momentary reservation. "Nothing, nothing could make you regard grandmamma with less reverence, could it, Mr. Catherwood? You cannot imagine how anxious I have been and am. I have been able to deceive myself till quite recently, but I cannot do so any longer."

He said little, but contrived to let her know that he shared her love and reverence and solicitude for one who had been both friend and mother to him, persuading her into the hope that the transition from activity to feebleness, from a strong grasp on thought to a childish mental passivity, might be so gradual and gentle, as well as inevitable, that it would after all mean no more than the

setting of the sun under a bank of clouds after a long and brilliant day.

They continued walking down the lawn till they reached the gate leading through the stone wall into the meadow. He opened it and she passed in. As he closed it, a sweeter sense of aloneness with her than he had ever felt before assailed him, keeping him silent. He could hear the brushing of her skirts on the grass that edged the path. He listened to her step keeping pace with his own.

The morning was half gone, and everything lay exposed and dazzling in the sunshine. The very grass shone. The sky glittered. The insect world was as joyous as if spring had just opened — and now the summer was waning. There was no sadness in nature, except as man interpreted her by his own feelings. A high jubilancy of sentiment made the present as absolute to him, with this woman so near, as it was to the birds and the flowers. It was the essence of immortality.

And Susanna, too, but a few minutes before weighed down by foreboding, thought, as they sauntered on, side by side, that her feet had never felt so winged.

They came to the garden, and she busied herself for a few minutes in gathering some sweet peas for her grandmother. He watched her reaching hither and thither for the blossoms. Her head was bare, and along the part and around her temples there was a streak of gold. She turned and it was gone, but in that moment of glorification he had apotheosized her, and he walked on, too full of emotion to meet her without pouring forth his feeling — and for this he knew she was not ready. Would she ever listen to him as he wanted to see her listen — as he knew she would some day listen to somebody?

Hearing her hurrying steps, he slackened his pace, and she came up, holding out the flowers. "Look at this wilderness of color! Just smell!" She held them up, impulsively brushing his face with them, as he inclined his head. "I want you to drink in all their fragrance."

The next instant she stepped away, tremulous with emotion. She had surprised herself in some unaccountable manner with this new effort towards the lost freedom and familiarity of her girlhood.

Again they wandered on in that delightful, disarming

stillness, during which she felt as though she had lost her wits and self-control in one.

They went into a conservatory, allured by the green vistas showing through the open doors. But they came out almost immediately, Susanna declaring it suggested the city.

Sinking down on a seat in the shade of a linden, she began to arrange her flowers. Catherwood walked away, down a rose-tree aisle.

Some of the monthlies were still in bloom. He found one with a full, white flower, the petals and heart touched with pink. He had never seen it before, but he thought it very beautiful, and he picked the most perfect rose, stripping off the briars and turning towards her with an impetuous resolution, the flower held high in his outstretched hand.

His manner was arresting. She watched him advance. There was something firm and grand and imposing about him. It was a hot day, but she shivered.

As he came in front of her, he handed the rose to her with an odd mixture of humility and defiance.

"How beautiful! Why, it is a bride!" she exclaimed.

"Is it?" he asked ingenuously.

The briefest, most flitting shadow of a smile illuminated her face. She experienced that inadvertent, womanly wonder over his failure to seize the opportunity, and was in a queer maze of gladness and regret.

Her equanimity was perfect as she thrust his flower into her belt, and, as she did so, she felt an exulting defiance of freedom and self-possession once more. She began talking discriminately and rather bookishly on roses, and Catherwood sat down beside her, thankful, too, that he had not precipitated what a few minutes before he had adjured himself rigidly to withhold for the present.

Two or three days later, the travellers started on an easy journey through New England. The minister bade them good by at the station in a commonplace, friendly way, but with a vivid realization mingled with regret that the next time he should see them, it would be under the inevitable limitations of city life and when those abstractions of position, duty, and conviction holding such imperial sway over him would give him the hurry and

absorption of manner which Susanna seemed to feel so irritating.

He remained in Stonebury another week, sedulous in his attentions to the Geraldts and helping Mrs. Gerald out with two or three dinner-parties in return for her kindness and hospitality to him. He walked or drove wherever Susanna and he had been together. This mingled pleasure and duty accomplished, he went up into Canada for a week, returning home to resume his pulpit on the last Sunday in August, to the surprise and delight of the few parishioners who had remained in the city or who were back earlier than usual.

CHAPTER XIII

Mrs. DUTTON and Susanna ended their wanderings at Lupton, a quaint town full of traditions of innumerable Duttons and Breretons, and where the childhood and youth of the old lady had been passed.

Ever since their departure from Windshelter, they had been stopping, so it seemed to the younger woman, in towns or villages leaving a composite memory of a central square around which clustered a few big, white houses with green blinds, a village store, a blacksmith's, a post-office, a tavern, and a white church with a tower consisting of a series of square boxes diminishing in size and set one on top of the other, the highest emphasized by green shutters like those of the long windows under the eaves. Dominating this rural picture were ancient elms, under whose canopy the scene lay in sheltered obscurity.

Mrs. Dutton apparently had but two objects in view,—to visit the graves of Duttons or Breretons long ago forgotten by the living population, and to attend every service in the various Congregational churches.

On hot September days, and in a kind of helpless dismay, Susanna followed the venerable woman as she picked her way through the long, matted grass growing over sunken graves, or crouched in an eager, rheumatic heap before mossy slate or brownstone slabs from which the obliterating hand of time had removed an initial, a name, or a date, as if to put her in an endless query of speculation. On the way to church, she would loiter to listen to the ringing of the bells, as if their tones contained celestial music audible to her ears alone.

At such times, Susanna would experience a choking sensation. The far-away, reminiscent look on her grandmother's wrinkled and attenuated countenance awoke an uncanny feeling of loneliness, as if these forced relations

with a distant past stirred some youthful instinct of antipathy. She began to realize that it was one thing to read the letters and see the portraits and review the actions, on the glowing pages of history, of men and women in her ancestral line, but another, and more sombre one, to sit in the empty pews, to tread upon the neglected graves, to linger outside the dilapidated homesteads of kindred whose lives had been cast in quieter places and whose history had perished with their generation. But she saw that it was otherwise with her grandmother, and, with a beautiful solicitude, patiently joined in these wearisome rambles.

At Lupton, where the graveyard was more than usually melancholy, Mrs. Dutton manifested such an eager and feverish anxiety that Susanna begged her anew to desist.

"Of what earthly good is it, grandmamma? If it makes me sad to see these neglected places, how must you feel who knew their occupants! Do let us go back to New York."

They were resting in the shadow of an enclosure surrounded by a towering wall of arbor-vitæ. Cedar trees marked the four corners. On every side were similar enclosures, a shaft occasionally peering above, mute witness to the silent inhabitants. A light wind stirred the hot, close atmosphere, heavy with aromatic scents.

"I had just a hundred uncles, aunts, and cousins. They are all gone. I found the one-hundredth grave to-day; at least, I think I did. Some of the children have no stones, but the mounds are there, or the depressions, near their fathers and mothers."

"A hundred! Did you know them all?"

"Yes. Of course a good many of the babies died."

"Why? How many babies died?"

"Well, a good many. It was the way in those days, you know. We all came of big families and most of us had families just as large. I lost seven little ones. They came so fast and were so puny. Then I had your mother. I never expected to raise Maggie." She wiped her eyes. "We made ten, you see, counting me in. All my children but Maggie are here in the old Brereton vault, as I have told you many times."

"Tell me about your other relatives," said Susanna, coaxingly.

"Well, there was my Uncle Byrom. He had four wives and twenty-six children."

"What a heathen!"

"Oh, no. He was called the salt of the earth right here in Lupton. He was one of the bulwarks of the town and a great power in the church. He never had any trouble in finding somebody to marry him."

"I wouldn't speak to him, if he rose from his grave this minute. Why did so many of his wives die? What could he do for so many children?"

"The children were expected to do for the parents when I was young. It was the way in those days. Let me see! How was it his wives came!" She rubbed her forehead. "I remember now. He married Nettie first. She was sixteen. She died at twenty-six. Five of her children lie beside her. Four lived to grow up, though. Nettie went into a hasty decline. Then there was Sally. She had fifteen. Eight of them died. They lie in a row just above Nettie's. Sally died suddenly. She was a good patient woman. I never heard her complain. Then Byrom married Matilda Steers. She had twins. They both died. She had consumption. You see it wasn't his fault. His fourth wife was Betsey McBride and suitable in years. He was so afraid she would die that he almost kept her in a glass case. They are all yonder — Byrom, too." She pointed to a group of cypresses.

Susanna walked over to the graves and meditated on the long line of little mounds, faintly delineated. When she returned, her voice was half humorous, half pathetic. "I am glad your Uncle Byrom is no nearer kin to me than great-uncle. I noticed he even outlived Betsey McBride. Ninety, his tombstone says. What he needed was a course in physiology and altruism. He was a thorough-going Anglo-Saxon polygamist."

"Oh, no. He was always decent about it, Byrom was. He waited a full year, each time."

Susanna nodded. Her lips were set in a smiling bow, but her eyes were stern and thoughtful. "We haven't reached fifty yet."

"I don't believe you want to hear any more. It sounds mournful to me, when I begin to tell it. And the rest is the same story. Life was different — harder — especially for women. Nearly every man outlived two wives,

it seems to me, as I look back. And just about as many children died as lived."

"Would you have those times come back, grand-mamma, if you could?"

She shook her head with emphatic, grim denial. "It will take generations to get over the fatigue, the strain, and the burden of the first two centuries in this country. For most of the women it was work and child-bearing and church-going, and for most of the men it was exposure and grinding toil and church-going. It was a hard, earnest, consuming life, but, in some way, it made character."

"Except in Byrom's case," objected Susanna, sceptically. "There was a fundamental lack, somewhere, in his constitution."

"Oh, well, you must not be too hard on him. He lived according to his lights, Byrom did. But it puts me out of patience when I hear people talk about those good old times. These are the good times. I did not know how good they were till I made this journey. I want to go home now. I have seen the old towns, the old homes, the old graves, and they have given me nothing but heart-aches; but I wanted to do it thoroughly. Even the churches are different. Something is gone from them. The men in the pulpits look so young. The faces in the pews are the faces of strangers. Only the bells are the same. When I started, I wanted to settle on a plot in the cemetery here, for the vault is full; but I have changed my mind. The huckleberry knoll is the best. The soil is too poor for us ever to be disturbed there. And you have life before you and will keep everything sweet and clean there, won't you, Susanna?"

"Yes, yes, grandmamma. But we do not need to think of that now."

"You like the old place and will want to stay there sometimes, won't you?"

"I want a house in the orchard. It overlooks the knoll and the creek and the lowlands beyond so beautifully."

"And you would want to go there and stay awhile, all the same, wouldn't you — if I were beside Maggie?"

"O grandmamma, don't, don't! But, indeed, indeed, I would go there all the more — if —" She suppressed a sob.

"Well," said Mrs. Dutton, rising and looking around, as if saying farewell, "I am glad I shall never need speak of the subject again. Death is inevitable, but undesirable. The older I grow, the sweeter life is." She laid her face affectionately against Susanna's shoulder.

"It will be only a transition, grandmamma."

The old lady drew herself erect, inspired by the pious faith of a long life. Her faded eyes dilated. Her aged countenance assumed an expression of solemn anticipation. "And what a transition!"

The sun had sunk so low that long yellow beams began to steal through the hemlocks and cedars. The isolation and solitude of their surroundings struck home to Susanna's heart. Drawing her grandmother's arm within her own, she led the way out.

"We are going back to-morrow, aren't we," she asserted rather than asked, when she had placed the old lady in a piazza chair to rest.

"Yes, the sooner the better; I am homesick."

Celinda was telegraphed to that night, and, on their arrival, the following afternoon, they found the house ready for them with all the freshness and splendor of the autumn cleaning.

Mrs. Dutton subsided into a state of apathetic reverie and somnolence, seldom leaving her room. But her granddaughter entered into present interests with a tremendous energy of enthusiasm. She was sick of the past and relegated miniatures and genealogies to temporary obscurity. A formidable array of books on sociology, theology, and Presbyterianism took their place. Her studies now had to do with criminal law and domestic architecture. She drew plans for the orchard cottage. She busied herself with more extensive ones for tenements on some of her city lots. She spent one afternoon a week among Catherwood's poor on the East side. She also had a hospital day under Dr. MacBee's supervision. She saw a great deal of the minister and Hillerton and Peter Vroom, but generally under circumstances beyond their control and allowing her to maintain a court in which, apparently, she had no favorites.

Under all this stress of purpose and energy of action, she ripened in appearance and fact into a splendid

womanly maturity. Her step was often quick and firm; her eyes began to tell the story of a more intimate knowledge of the pathos of life; her laugh, less frequent, became mellow.

Hillerton felt puzzled and sometimes repelled by her impersonal attitude towards him; but there was her magnificent beauty, flashing out in rare, tender moods of emotional intellectuality. He cherished the masculine fallacy, however, that a woman, after all, is game which a skilful hunter, sooner or later, can run to cover. He loved fine horses and took long, solitary drives. Sometimes, as he watched his team respond to the bit, saw the foam fleck the neck and breast of the spirited nervous creatures, watched the play of muscle and the buoyancy of movement, an imperious desire seized him to hold Susanna with just such a firm, masterful hand, to see her daring yet obedient under his control, kept in check or let go at her fastest pace, as he willed. He began to watch Vroom with jealous eyes. He dogged Catherwood's movements with an uneasy dread of the minister's favorable opportunities for association and influence.

And Peter, more and more appreciative of what he had set out to win, grew prudent and conciliatory and overdocile, till Susanna longed to see him his natural self.

As the weeks passed, the old absorption crept into the minister's manner. Susanna was mortified, irritated, and pleased at once when she would sometimes encounter him staring at her with the wide-open eyes of the somnambulist, not hearing a thing she said, but all the time carrying on a line of thought. Only if she stopped talking suddenly, or rose abruptly to leave him, could she enjoy the triumph of seeing a startled light of affection and expostulation break up his seriousness. But at other times she knew, as only the woman who is loved can know, that the consciousness of her, the reverent fear of her, the longing for her, was underneath every thought, every act, every aspiration.

She was having a sharp encounter with herself. She was trying to find out how far life was worth living without him; she preferred comradeship, if the conditions of their relation could remain exactly as they were. And, besides, she was just as busy in her way as he was in his, and might, at his age, be as useful. Ambition

and love held out great prizes, and she was still unable to say which she preferred. She was in such a mood one mellow, November morning, as she walked across the town to the hospital. She passed through a park. The sparrows and the falling leaves thickened the air as if with a multitude of gray and yellow birds. The atmosphere was hazy. She grew into a gentle, optimistic frame, and her serious mood left her as she mounted the long staircase, at the top of which stood Dr. MacBee.

The doctor had the ultra-honest manner of the woman physician of the seventies. She had become unsexed, much as a man does who has fought a hard battle with adverse conditions; but she retained her ardent feminine sympathies and indignations. Her face was spare and wistful; her black skirts were scant and short; she carried the inevitable bag.

"The sight of you lifts a load from my mind," she exclaimed, seizing Susanna's hand with a nervous squeeze. "I am at my wit's end about a case we are going to discharge to-day. She declares she hasn't any place to go to, and, if she had, no ambition to work. She had typhoid during the summer, and she had a slow recovery. She is poor and sensitive and rebellious."

"Well," sighed Susanna, "if you come right down to the point, do you suppose that you or I, if we had had a run of fever, would feel like going to work?"

Dr. MacBee smiled. "You can't put the question in that way for a hundred years to come."

Susanna dropped her face on her hand and thought. "Send her around to me this afternoon—about four—I shall be out till then. I will keep her a few days, if necessary. Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"I do not think of anything further. Oh, yes, you can walk back across the park with me. I have a call to make on the West side. She is so pretty and helpless and silly," continued the doctor. "We have all lost our hearts over her and she knows it; but there is nothing to build on. She came from the country, and she ought to go back there. She might run a chance of making a decent marriage in time, if she were under safe conditions."

"You poor, dear, anxious heart," said the younger woman, taking the doctor's hand as they parted. "Drop

this burden. I will shoulder it. I will discover a solution."

On reaching home, Susanna found Peter waiting for her in the library. Something in his look, his manner, threw her into a neutral state, the woman's chief method of resistance.

But he had come with a dogged, resolute purpose, and it was in vain for her to fence with the situation.

Trembling with regret and the pity of it all, she composed herself to listen, finally, with that heartsick calmness so often mistaken for hardness.

If his appearance had been less intense, the bald literalness of his proposal would have carried with it a degree of absurdity sufficient to enable an ordinary woman to set him aside without much difficulty. But Peter in himself was a tremendous fact, and he understood the dominance of his mere presence.

But at length he understood, also, the strength of her resistance. A dread began slowly to take possession of him, as he noticed the still, clear light of her eye, the further and further withdrawal of her sympathy. The thought of the possible, absolute loss of her out of his life paralyzed him. He stopped pleading.

His face became brooding and wicked. He saw himself defeated in his supreme ambition. What could he do to bring her nearer his own level? A bold, audacious challenge came to his assistance. He bent towards her.

"Who saw Neeltje drown besides yourself?"

She put her hands to her face and started back, a momentary horror in her expression. She swayed, and then, drawing herself to her full height, her glorious, indignant eyes on a level with his, she whispered, "God!"

Her grand sincerity of manner, the unexpectedness of her reply, awed him.

He began to walk up and down in great agony of spirit, pleading his despair in extenuation.

"Listen to me, Peter," she said, and with an expostulating tenderness, as if reasoning with a child. "There are two sublime capacities in us all, — the capacity for love, the capacity for duty. As you have thought you loved me, take up your duty like a man."

"And if I do?"

"I shall be your friend."

"My friend!"

"To be a friend means much, Peter."

"It means less than nothing, if a man loves."

"You have never loved. You would have debased me through fear. Love begins and grows and survives only in unselfishness."

He bowed his head. His face aged. When he looked up, his eyes were strained. A great sob, half groan, tore itself out of his breast. Turning away from her, he lingered a moment, his hands clenched, and left the room like one whose sight has suddenly failed.

CHAPTER XIV

On reaching the street, Peter looked around bewildered; for a few seconds he could not tell where he was. Partly recovering himself, he turned towards Fifth Avenue. On coming to the Hoffman House, he went in and drank heavily. When he came out, his face was pale, his mouth was dogged and malicious. His black eyes were aflame with evil resolution.

He walked up the avenue, his gaze fixed, his step heavy and rapid. All the bad forces of his nature had reacted. He saw Susanna, splendid, adorable, unattainable; he saw Catherwood, studious, restrained, resolute, triumphant, and he hated the minister with a rage that made him catch his breath as he hurried on. It seemed an age before he could reach Catherwood's study. If he were not in there — he would follow him — follow him!

Climbing the stairs with the same quick, heavy tread, he tried the door. It opened, and he stood taking in the scene as one bent on a momentous purpose sees every detail of place and circumstance.

A fire smouldered on the hearth, the shadows were thick in the high Gothic ceiling and the corners of the bookcases. The gas jet beside the desk where the minister stood was hooded by its green screen, its light concentrated on his manuscript.

Evidently he had been intent on his sermon; for, as he glanced up at the interruption, Peter's entrance failed to convey any meaning. His eyes were expanded and indrawn, his features were stern, almost monastic.

But as Peter began to stride towards him, he awoke to a near, unpleasant issue, and, turning the hood of the jet so that the light flared out into the room, he went forward.

"Damn you!" said Peter, seizing his shoulder when he came near enough.

He shook himself loose. "What are you damning me for?"

"Damn you to the bottom of the worst hell you have ever preached about. I say — damn you!" His face became mottled and livid. His voice grew thick.

Catherwood perceived he had been drinking. "Here!" pushing a chair towards him, "sit down and recover yourself. What's the matter?"

Peter regarded him maliciously and sneeringly. The liquor was mounting to his head. Ideas chased through his brain with maddening rapidity. Susanna visualized herself before him — but his tongue grew heavier, the hate which had borne him thither began to waver, like a point receding on a distant horizon. What had he come for? What had Catherwood to do with it, anyhow? Then with a lurch of his body, emphasizing a more agonizing effort of will, he brought back the violence of his feeling.

"You have been false, in the way a man can't excuse. You have poisoned Miss Kildare's mind against me, in order to gain a better chance with her, and you're a damned mean hypocrite — you are!"

"If you weren't drunk, Vroom, I'd turn you out. What's the matter? What's happened?"

"Swear, upon your honor, that you haven't tried to influence her against me!"

Catherwood flushed with his effort at self-control. He walked up and down the room, Peter's eyes, gloomy and revengeful, following him. He realized now that Hillerton and Vroom had been as keenly watchful of him as he had been of them. The reticence and dignity of his nature seemed violated by this assault. But it had to be met, and, as far as possible, impersonally. He owed it to Susanna. He was her defender, the guardian of her name from publicity, to the extent of his power, as much as if she were his wife.

"I am ready to swear, Vroom, if it will give you peace of mind, that I have never influenced Miss Kildare against you. And you know, as well as I do, that such a course would have been worse than useless. I will admit that I have cherished the same hope that you

have, but I have never yet seen the time when I dared acknowledge it to her without the risk of a refusal. If she has refused you, you have had a fair chance with others, and you ought to meet your defeat honorably and honestly."

"Honestly and honorably! I'd dare the devil for Susanna."

Catherwood drew himself erect, as Peter spoke her name with easy familiarity.

"Oh, she is not afraid of me as you are. You're in a profession that takes all the spirit and grit and fight out of a man. You would have knocked me down, otherwise, when I damned you."

"It would have been too easy a way of getting rid of you."

"It would, eh! You didn't dare. That's the sum of the matter. It'd looked well in the papers to-morrow, to read that the pious Catherwood, pastor of the Calvin Memorial, had knocked a man down because of a woman. Well, I'll tell you one thing. You are too cautious, and too proper, and too politic for a woman like Susanna Kildare ever to say she will marry you." There was a low cunning in his eye, a brutal sneer about his mouth.

A hot, mad swirl of passion and indignation sent the blood mounting to Catherwood's head. This was the same Peter of years ago. A thrashing then had done him good; it would now. The muscles of his arm tightened, he doubled his fist, and, the next instant, Peter lay an unconscious, drunken heap on the floor.

Catherwood wasted neither pity nor compunction, but busied himself in bringing Vroom to consciousness; when this was accomplished, the minister sat down before him as judge and opponent in one.

Peter hung his head in profound thought. When he looked up, there was an admiring, conciliatory gleam in his eyes.

"Well, you're the same Catherwood, after all, that you were when I was a boy. I think more of you than I have in some time. You've got the right stuff in you, no mistake!"

Catherwood felt a sickening recoil.

"But Susanna, Miss Kildare, might have done something for me. I believe in her. I look up to her as

much as a man can to a woman. She seems another kind. I started out to win her, because Storm had set his heart on her. But when I began to notice her, she pleased me all around. She could have made a different man of me." He threw up his arms suddenly. "O God—damn it! I love her! I want her!" He turned to Catherwood like some great animal mortally wounded.

"You will never have a quarter of what you really want." The minister's voice was full of admonitory sternness. "Don't you know it by this time? That is one of the meanings of life. Moreover, we don't any of us know what we want, half the time. We think we do, but that is another matter. If Miss Kildare did care for you, you are not fit for her. You are not fit for any woman. You are a great beast of a man!"

Peter glowered at him with burning, bloodshot eyes, and began pacing up and down the long, solemn room like some imprisoned, desperate criminal. But, for the first time in his life, he felt himself held in check by an overmastering desire hampering his lower nature. Controlling as his passion for Susanna was, it was dominated by a higher, simpler longing. Hers had been the one great soul into which he had ever looked or cared to look, where purity dwelt, and, in the midst of his contending emotions, his need of some continuance of association with her reigned supreme.

Catherwood saw this, rejoiced in it, and, at the right moment, seized upon the one vulnerable point in his otherwise stolid, stubborn nature. After a time, Peter stopped walking, throwing himself into an armchair beside the big table cumbered with books and manuscript. He buried his hands in his pockets. His heavy, handsome face continued pale. Two deep furrows emphasized his shaggy, black eyebrows. Varied thoughts and emotions made his eyes contract or sparkle or grow dull and obstinate. His conflicting feelings, his arguments with himself, were successively stamped upon his countenance.

Catherwood's hope of something ultimately finer in Vroom grew, as he watched the wordless battle. He realized that Peter was reviewing the past, forecasting the future, passing through that experience rarely vouchsafed to assertive, self-assured, and material natures when they see themselves impersonally and

with the vision of natures larger than their own. He went back to his desk and tried to write, but his thoughts were too discursive. He stood with his face supported by his hands, looking out through the high window at the stretch of blue sky thickly clustered with stars, at the distant view of the avenue, up and down which the stages rumbled and throngs of men and women appeared to flit, black-robed and voiceless. How different the reality; for each one of those mute and sombre figures, if seen at a tragic moment, would exhibit the whole gamut of human emotion, as here in his silent study Peter was full of feeling too deep for utterance.

Underneath all that Catherwood thought and felt was a warm, vivid, proud perception of heroic possibilities in Susanna. What a benign, renewing influence she seemed capable of exercising over Peter! What an inspiration, a force, a magnet, she was to himself, attracting yet never debasing, vivifying yet never consuming, with a beneficent largeness and sweetness in her personality, of which she seemed unconscious, thrilling him whenever he was beside her with the ardent, quick passion of the lover, but, also, renewed ambitions, and a vague satisfaction of feeling, whose similitude he had never experienced except as a child when his cup of contentment was filled by the mere presence of his mother. Was this last thought the solution of the enigma forever tormenting and forever evading him? Men talked so much, and wrote so much, and thought so much of women as wives — or as mothers of their children. "Our children!" Catherwood half smiled. "Our children!" say the men, when women are like the fruitful earth, inciting, protecting, and perfecting within their own bodies the wonderful growth called humanity in its dual aspect, — agonizing as the earth does when mountains and seas are born; suffering as the soul does, through each new development, for what? not for their children! but for the children of men, of men like Peter, and for whom men like Peter, as well as good and thoughtful men, assume the right to make laws, to formulate customs, to withhold or give, according as the new birth is marked in the likeness of man or woman. And upon this being, so passive, so active, so suffering, so patient, motherhood was oftener than not forced, against her volition, against

her judgment, only to see the fruit of her sacrifice dominated over, not by her wishes, not by her love, born out of and intensified by her "agony and passion," but by the conqueror of her physical weakness.

He seemed to see Susanna, like a goddess of liberty, pointing the way to a spacious harbor of privileges become rights where motherhood should have a sacred, statutory power to watch over sons and daughters, and frame out of the vigilant justice and divine love of her protective nature laws by which one sex would become as notable a factor as the other in the unfolding and perpetuating of the world's progress through a magnificent posterity born of pure fathers and glad mothers.

Even Vroom, in some ground-throe of sentiment and perception, mysterious and perplexing and revolutionary to his entire past, felt the upward lift of a new, large influence which Susanna personified to him.

Catherwood straightened his shoulders, striking his hand heavily on his desk, as if knocking off in thought shackles from half the race.

The sound aroused Peter, who looked up as one awaking from a profound sleep. An open Bible lay before him. Picking it up, he went over to the minister, placing the book on the desk. He spread his big, muscular hand upon it, and, without preliminary explanation, said solemnly, "I am going to be another kind of man, God helping me." Without further words he went out.

CHAPTER XV

ONLY after Peter had left did Catherwood remember that he had had no supper. His college habits stood him in good stead, however, when under pressure, and he decided to prepare his own meal rather than go out in his present frame of mind and probably encounter acquaintances who might detain him till midnight.

The grim study was full of the aroma of coffee and rarebit, when the door opened and Hillerton walked in.

For a moment, the minister felt the keen disappointment of the overwearied man whose sole opportunity for rest has been invaded, but he controlled himself instantly, forgot his fatigue, and, nodding half affectionately, motioned the elder to a chair and continued his preparations.

When the result of his culinary efforts lay sprawled on a newspaper on the big table before the fire, the large crackers well padded with the melted cheese, the cups full to the brim with rich, clear coffee, the two men drew up their chairs, falling upon the feast like boys.

There was a strong affinity between them, notwithstanding they usually parted in the midst of argument in which neither would yield a point.

Hillerton felt a proprietary pride in Catherwood's eloquence, while the minister's curious mixture of literal honesty and astute perception of practical matters upon which he never permitted himself to act, no matter how great the temptation, unless policy coincided with principle, kept the elder in a perpetual ferment of unrest concerning church affairs.

The choir was the nearest issue, and Hillerton had called to say that he had assumed the personal responsibility of virtually engaging the quartette to his own liking, with the hope that Catherwood would no longer oppose an objection.

Meanwhile, earlier in the day, the minister had had his attention directed anew to the wretched condition of Hillerton's tenements, and as soon as the elder came in he decided that, tired though he was, he should never have a better chance of talking the matter over.

Each man, with his own object uppermost in mind, never tried harder to be agreeable, and with the happiest results in one respect and the most unfortunate in another. They were more than commonly confidential, and thus, while their mutual admiration waxed, each believed that the other, through this frank display of temperament and ambition, needed shielding from himself. Hillerton, therefore, felt particularly glad that he had managed the matter of the choir so near a conclusion that Catherwood would be compelled to yield; and Catherwood, convinced that his influence over Hillerton was practically boundless, saw, with enthusiastic vision, those unsanitary and pestilential dwellings torn down and model tenements erected in their place.

But the minister was to learn in the future that the present belongs, in almost every instance, to men like Hillerton, who never sacrifice business interests to moral scruples, and the future never to men like himself, unless their faith in humanity is fortified by a tireless patience and a willingness to do the planting while others enjoy the reaping. Catherwood was still happy with the joyousness called the joyousness of youth, but which is oftener the overconfidence of inexperience. It was nearly eleven o'clock before he let himself theorize on the necessity of a law for the demolition of tenements which were a menace to the public health.

"Why, man, that would be a tyrannical assault on private property! I, for one, would fight it to the bitter end. What set such a crazy idea afloat in your brain?" Hillerton regarded him with affectionate humor.

Catherwood rubbed his hands through his hair, tilting his chair back.

"It is not a crazy idea. To the owners of such places it might seem a bit too altruistic. But altruism will be one of the watchwords of the near future. I know what I am speaking about, when I tell you I could not partake of the communion, or preach another sermon, if I were the owner of one of those death-traps, a rear tenement,

reeking with filth and dampness, and shutting out the light and air from buildings facing on the street. Such a use of land is a crime to the tenants and a menace to a whole city."

"The owner has nothing to do with ultimate moral issues," replied Hillerton, looking straight ahead, his large, full, dark eyes fixed obstinately on the wall. "Tenants occupy such houses because they can't afford better, and owners rent them because property must pay for itself. Everything in the world is on the basis of first, second, and third class, and the man who can't afford the best must take the worse. There is no right or wrong about it; it is necessity."

"Necessity for the tenant, but not for the landlord. Let him make improvements and reduce his per cent from ten to four, and the thing can be done."

"Half the so-called rich people would go to the wall, if they lived on investments averaging four per cent."

"Let them go to the wall, then. It would not be the worst thing that could happen to them."

"If they did, the tenements would grow poorer instead of better. There would be no surplus at all with which to repair them. A man who has the capacity to make money and keep it is never going to help the shiftless out of a meagre surplus. It is men whom you call altruists who do that sort of thing. Then, the first you know, they are in debt, and the thrifty rich against whom they railed have to turn around and support them."

Catherwood did not immediately respond. He had a great array of facts growing out of constant intercourse with the poor. He had visited various members of the Health Board time and again, and had the data of that body; but he felt as all men of high ideals do, who are not large property owners; he felt he lacked the moral weight which accompanies the testing of a theory by a personal investment. Nothing was left for him to do, therefore, but to try to persuade those who had the power, to aid him—a duty he oftener than not found disagreeable and discouraging.

He had already gone so far as to organize a society of ministers pledged to use their influence in the pulpit and out of it to deplore the heavy mortality and the frightful growth of crime among the young in tenements, and

to impress upon their congregations an individual and corporate responsibility in seeking both the cause and the prevention. He now told Hillerton of this society.

"Do you mean anything personal, Catherwood? Are you finding fault with me?"

"I am trying to call your attention to a state of things that must be changed. The death-rate in New York has got to come down. We have had a health department long enough to see a greater improvement, and water on every side of us! The churches have got to take hold, and they are going to do it. Christ bequeathed the poor to us, and, as His beneficiaries, they must be better housed, better fed, and given sweeter, cleaner air. The blood of thousands rests already upon this city. We are good enough friends, Hillerton, to stand a little plain talking to each other in private, and I must confess that some of your houses are among the worst I have seen, for two reasons. In the first place, several of your ground stories are used for saloons where drunkenness is rampant and all sorts of other vice breed, and, in the second place, you are renting leaky garrets, and rooms under which cellars are in such a vile condition that even the plumbers refuse to risk their lives in the half repairs ordered."

"Well, what would you have me do about it?"

"I would have you tear them down."

"Nonsense."

"It is sanity, not nonsense. I wouldn't keep a dog in a rookery of yours I visited yesterday."

Hillerton's eyes snapped and he looked exasperated underneath the smile with which he challenged the minister.

"I'll tell you what, Catherwood, you come to the wrong quarter when you tackle a business man like me. It is true I have made a lot of money in my day, and I have lost a lot, too. Reverses breed prudence and common sense. There is Miss Kildare; she is rich; she is altruistic. She has inherited, not worked for, her money, as I have. Besides, she is a woman, and ministers can do whatever they like with women. Ask her to buy one of my so-called rookeries at a fair valuation; get her to tear it down and build up something in its place with which you and she can amuse yourselves by planning it together — patches of lawn, bath-tubs, and all that sort

of thing; then turn a litter of pigs in with their respective sow and boar and let me know at the end of a year how much better off those human animals are and what per cent Miss Kildare's venture has yielded. I promise to listen respectfully to whatever you may have to tell me as the result of experience."

"Miss Kildare is already building a model tenement on her own property. She does not require any of your tenements with which to test the matter."

"Ah, then this fad is her idea—a woman's idea—precisely." He rose, standing in front of Catherwood with an air of banter and condescension.

"It is her idea; it is mine; it is the idea of a score of others who are the pioneers in a new reform. It has occurred to each of us, as far as I can find out, as a new idea comes to several scientists not in previous contact with one another, but at the moment when the time is ripe for a needed discovery. But if it were solely Miss Kildare's idea, it would be none the less worthy of respect and trial."

"There I do not agree with you, my friend," replied Hillerton, who had recovered himself, and, watchful of the hour and feeling that the choir matter had still to be exploited, rested his hand propitiatingly on the minister's shoulder. At the same time, now that he had inadvertently broached the subject of Miss Kildare, he intended, both for the sake of the argument and an ever-present, jealous consciousness of Catherwood's regard for her, not to drop it at once. "No woman's opinion on practical, outside issues can be of prime moment. No man's would, except for the rough-and-tumble contact with men life forces upon him. And then there is the perpetual emotional quality in women. It precludes them from being good judges or good financiers. The best they can do with money is to preserve it; they cannot be money-makers. One only has to look at Miss Kildare, for example, to see that she is all emotion. That college education, these absurd studies of hers, enable her to mask it by an outward show of Portia's calmness, but Portia is there, just as the Portia of the stage displays her sex in the tones and flexibility of her voice and in the very nature of her pleading. The natural outlet of that girl's nature is pent up, and it takes

an abnormal turn in consequence. Once she is a wife and mother, we shall not hear anything further of law and architecture or model tenements." His practical face softened with imaginative contemplation.

"Once a man is a husband and father, does his interest outside of his own selfish little round cease?" asked Catherwood.

"Ah, you reckon with a different force when you speak of men. Marriage and children are incidental to their careers. Husband and child are the career of a woman. And what man wants a wife whose thought or action runs outside his orbit! There can be but one head, and that head is the man. Read Corinthians."

"I have read Corinthians. I have studied the history of Corinth, also." He began softly to whistle a hymn tune.

Hillerton regarded him with a puzzled air, and presently he stopped whistling and looked up with a humorous appreciation of their rivalry. "Miss Kildare, thus far," the minister went on, "seems to cherish a pretty clear notion of herself and her destiny. I think it would require a bolder man than either you or I appears to be to ask her to surrender her ideas, let alone herself, to his guidance."

The elder drew a long breath, relieved to hear that Catherwood also apparently felt doubtful of his suit. The relief he experienced was tremendous. He had an access of kindly feeling. "I suppose each of us knows what the other wants," he said, walking back and forth before the fire. "I hope the result will never make us bad friends. I declare that woman taxes my courage harder than the advance on Richmond did. We won then. I would like to win her. But, I don't know, I don't know. Well, it will be midnight in a few minutes, and I haven't mentioned what brought me here. We left the choir matter unsettled last spring, you remember."

Catherwood nodded. His features sharpened. He felt attentive.

"I have taken the liberty of engaging an uncommon quartette." He mentioned the names.

The minister was silent a moment. Then he said: "The bass and contralto would be an acquisition. But

I should seriously object to the soprano and tenor, as I have already told you."

"Oh, pshaw, don't be finical. I thought six months more in New York would dispel such an idea."

"They haven't." He smiled. "I was not aware, before, that you considered me provincial."

"Boston and the wild West," replied Hillerton, laughing, glad to spar a little. "What else could you expect me to think of you?"

"Very well! Narrow as I am, Presbyterian 'Law and Usage' makes me the moderator of the session, and the minister and the session control the choir. We shall have to bring the matter forward at the next meeting. It ought to be settled."

"There is such a law, it is true, but the singing has virtually rested in my hands the last ten years."

Catherwood's lips showed an inflexible determination. "Differing as we do on this point, I see no other way than to bring it before the session."

Hillerton's brow contracted. For the first time, he felt offended with his pastor. He was eager to silence the popular outcry against the Calvin Memorial. His musical ear was sorely hurt by congregational singing; it did not matter a whit to him that it was singing for worship. It made a barbarous jargon, and he wanted an end put to it. He had been watching his chance to form a choir to vie with that of their Episcopal neighbor, the Church of the Crusaders, and here was Catherwood winning the congregation to the notion of a quartette, and then displaying an unreasonable inability to separate art from the artist, and thus presenting what might prove to be an insuperable obstacle. On the other hand, he respected the minister's shrewdness in falling back upon the law. Realizing that there was no more to be said at this juncture, he determined to outwit his colleague by working up a majority on his own side.

There was a little desultory conversation on personal matters, and then he went away.

Catherwood hauled a pile of blankets down from the dark regions of a closet and, wearied to the extent of a numbness of all his thinking powers, threw himself on his lounge and slept dreamlessly till daybreak.

He was an early riser, and the following morning he

had visited his rooms on the East side; eaten breakfast, and examined his mail by the time business men were riding down town. Before night, every elder and deacon had been visited, and the issue canvassed with all the persuasiveness, conscientiousness, and personal power which had made him such a force with his people.

Unexpectedly withheld from his purpose till the next day, Hillerton felt the chagrin of the shrewd man of affairs in discovering that his own method had been anticipated and acted upon with a celerity for which he would not have given Catherwood credit. He realized, also, that the conservatism for which the Calvin Memorial was famous was up in arms against the ungodly and dangerous introduction of a quartette, two of whose members were atheists and one addicted to heavy drinking. When the session met, Catherwood lent his influence towards the quartette, but he felt the triumphant thrill of a man who has won a cause for conscience' sake, when, notwithstanding Hillerton's arguments, the session decided against the soprano and tenor, selecting candidates of the minister's own choosing.

In spite of efforts to the contrary, the relations of the two men were strained during the early winter.

Meanwhile, the plans for the church were finished. Susanna's new tenements advanced so far as to be under cover, and the interior work well along, by January. The orchard cottage on the farm was also in a fair way towards completion during the early spring.

CHAPTER XVI

ANIMATED by a curiosity at once unreasonable and persistent, Hillerton started out one morning to inspect the Kildare tenements. He was fully aware of the condition of his own houses and satisfied, to a degree of which Catherwood would have been unable to conceive, to have them remain so. But, with the self-consciousness and irritable pride of a man who invariably thinks well of himself, he wanted to see the materialization of ideas and innovations he was prepared beforehand to condemn.

As he approached the East River, the fog-horns sounded blatantly. The population, apparently, became more numerous. Orange and banana peel rendered the footing precarious. Ridges of mingled dirt and snow lay piled in slowly thawing masses in the streets and areas. Effluvia, as composite as the immigration dumped upon the mercy and the forbearance of the city, filled his nostrils. Children of all ages and sizes, with the rank profusion of infusoria breeding in swamps or swarming in carrion, sped hither and thither with the aimless, hazy flutter of August flies. Women with leathery skin and pouchy chins and figures were everywhere present — poorly fed, frost-bitten, sordid-looking creatures, with a universal hungry aspect, as if starved in body, mind, and soul. There were men, too, but they were fewer in number, and expressive of the two aspects of masculine leisure in an East side community, — decrepitude and drunkenness.

On a declivity, the river and Brooklyn clearly in view, Hillerton came to the tenements.

The exterior did not at once prepare him for what he was to see, although he noted, with the eye of a man watchful of details, the good quality of the bricks, the

substantial heaviness of the window-frames, and the thickness of the walls.

The lot on which the building stood was a double one and running through from street to street. There was a wide passage in the centre of the structure, the vaulted opening to which, with the exception of a narrow doorway, was temporarily boarded up. The remaining three stories presented the usual unbroken façade of windows, except that over the passage, whose interior opened to the sky, there was a series of arches evidently intended to admit light and air.

He stepped across the doorway, through which hod-carriers were passing in and out, and a sight met his gaze which made him stop incredulous over what he considered Miss Kildare's wasteful folly.

Hooded iron staircases ascended either side of the passage to the upper stories, and from these the entrances to the different apartments opened, while the doorways of the ground floor were similar to those seen in Paris or Florence admitting to the porter's room.

Walking on, he found that the passage terminated in a court, sixty by fifty feet and ample enough to permit abundant air and sunshine. The centre already indicated that a fountain of generous dimensions was to occupy it.

On the opposite side of the court was a structure similar to the one he had passed, and he now realized for the first time that Miss Kildare's property, facing as it did on two streets, afforded opportunity to utilize every foot of ground.

Stepping inside one of the apartments, he saw that it consisted of three fair-sized rooms, a bath-room, and a store-room. The room opening on the passage was evidently intended for the living-room or kitchen, and gave admittance to the other rooms, the bath-room, — which was ventilated by a shaft leading to the roof, — and also the store-room.

He had to acknowledge that the ventilation was an assured fact, and the problem of light better solved than he had ever seen it before. But the court and the passages leading to it, — in these lay the supreme extravagance, and land in New York rising in value every year. On four city lots, which ought to yield a far greater

housing capacity, Miss Kildare had but thirty-two apartments.

The upper stories being in a more advanced stage, he ascended one of the iron staircases, entering an apartment with a southern exposure. He was in the fourth story, and, as the elevation was considerable, the streets on which the tenements stood being the crown of one of the few hills left in the city below the Park, he could view the busy life of the East River as well as see the hotels and churches on and near Madison Square.

Although fires had been lighted to facilitate the drying of the walls, and he wore a fur-lined coat, he was conscious of the penetrating chill. But he looked big, florid, and handsome, as though no breath of sickness or poverty could ever touch him, and had the substantial, manly splendor of appearance and well-being usually so attractive to young women.

A step, not that of a hod-carrier, made him turn, and he beheld Miss Kildare standing in the middle of the room and radiant with pleased surprise. He noticed an evanescent perfume of violets doing valiant battle with the heavy, suffocating odor of damp plaster, and she seemed to him like a big bouquet of bloom and fragrance.

"You are the very man I want to see! I have just discovered that you own the corner below my houses. Oh, do promise me, if you ever build there, that you won't rent the ground floor for a saloon; I feel as if a saloon there might be the one thing to defeat my experiment."

She stood looking up at him with a panting expectation, and, as he gazed into the depths of her honest, glowing eyes, an imperious irresistible desire grew upon him to take her in his arms, and, pressing her uplifted face to his heart, promise her anything if she would nestle there content. He had become too well aware, by this time, of her impersonal extravagance of demand, to have any surety that she would consider herself committed to him in any way, even though he should give her the very sun, if he had the power to do so, if there were no previous stipulation of conditions. And the fact remained, as he was sadly aware, that she never really asked anything, apparently, of anybody for herself.

"Do you think of building on that corner soon?" she continued, stepping still nearer.

"I have had it under consideration. House agents tell me, though, that building has been somewhat overdone of late. And this is a dull season."

She regarded him a little ruefully, somewhat questioningly. She knew his cautious habit of looking upon the minutest detail of expenditure from all sides, while in his personal habits he was the furthest possible removed from penuriousness or even economy.

She leaned back against the window-frame, her color coming and going with the thought of a new request. She clasped her hands, and Hillerton fondly noticed the fit and faultless freshness of her gloves. Again the perfume of the violets came to him like the breath of spring.

"I do wish," she said, "I do wish you would build a house something like mine on that corner. The architect feels sure mine is going to be a signal success. Why, I have given the refusal for two of the sets of rooms already."

He smiled quizzically, but his eyes were indulgent. "Do not place too much weight on a refusal. Never feel sure you have made a rental till the lease is signed. You have put a lot of money in this affair," he said, more coldly, and with an edge of criticism in his tones, very depressing to her.

"I have been happy in doing so," she replied, with some defiance.

"Ah, if you have done it to make yourself happy, I am the last man in the world to discourage you. I — do not think any one could more desire to see you happy than — I."

"My happiness in the matter is, of course, incidental. I got past building houses for toys several years ago. I enjoy building, for I have a genuine enthusiasm over architecture, as you know; but, truly, Mr. Hillerton," and she smiled as if her good-nature neither could nor should be invaded, "I am putting up these houses for others' sake. I am trying to do what I can to solve the problem of tenement reform. I have seen a few of the horrid, awful places in this neighborhood, and I should feel as if I were committing murder to own one, shouldn't you? I am planting my experiment right here in the

midst of them, hoping it will be a light set on a hill. What do you think of it? Isn't the court cheerful! And couldn't a neat young wife make a pretty parlor of this room we are in! I think I shall furnish one apartment when they are all finished, as a model. Don't you think it would be a good idea?"

"What class of working people do you expect to rent the rooms to?" he asked.

"I presume there will, of course, have to be a little latitude allowed in the beginning. I have had young mechanics just starting in life in mind—and I have decided that there must be restrictions."

"My dear Miss Kildare," he expostulated, "restrictions will be impossible. They will kill your property dead. Make an estimate of the per cent the investment is to yield you, and get it! no matter how you fill the rooms. Keep your repairs, keep everything in check by that estimate, and you will come out, finally, A No. 1. Otherwise you will find you have sunk your money. This court is all very fine, but what a pile of capital it means lying idle, and in New York!"

She felt a chill of nameless disappointment and depression. "I am sorry you are not in sympathy with my ideas," she said, the buoyancy gone from her voice under the stress of his general disapproval.

"What do your theories matter, as long as I am in sympathy with you?—and I am, always."

"My theories are a part of me. You can't separate us," she replied, with considerable haughtiness.

He laughed a little, said, "Oh, oh, I can! I did, long ago," and regarded her with an expression in which sentiment had gained the supremacy.

She felt dismayed, alarmed, and in her desire to slip away and go home, confusion overtook her.

He misread her and, convinced that his moment had come, though most inopportunistly, plunged into a confession of all his hopes and fears, his ambitions, of which she had become the fixed centre, his prospects, of what he could and would do for her, promising her the corner property, promising never to restrain or hinder her in the use of her money, promising to allow her such freedom as he never would have dreamed of giving a wife, before he met her, if she would be his wife.

He had talked so rapidly, so masterfully, that she could not stop him. As he went on, she did not wish to do so. What he said seemed so strange to her, as her talk about the tenements had seemed incongruous to him.

He would let her do as she wished with her own! He would give her things — property! when she already had more than she knew what to do with. Did he think her a greedy materialist? He would allow her her freedom! That she had already. She was not a slave; she never had been. There was no suggestion of restraint he was willing to have her impose on him. She was to give him herself, and retain, as special proof of his love and indulgence, what she already possessed and enjoyed without a single thought of privilege.

It was her turn to smile, to feel her wings already fluttering for speedy flight.

"I have never said or done anything, have I, Mr. Hillerton," she inquired, with a sweet seriousness, "to lead you to this declaration?"

"You have permitted my addresses," he replied kindly and tentatively.

"Could a woman do otherwise," she asked, in the same kind voice, "with custom as it is, and circumstances to bring us together continually? I never felt sure of your intentions."

"You might have."

"No," shaking her head, but with extreme gentleness. "I only felt sure about you as a friend — about my friendship for you."

He began to hope. "Have I been too hasty? Have I pressed the matter while you still feel not quite ready to come to a decision? Is that it?" He bent over her, his growing hope illuminating and transfiguring his countenance.

"No — that is not — what I mean." There was a hesitating ingenuousness in tone and manner. Nothing could have been more disarming than her sweetness and conciliatoriness. "This is what I mean. When a woman has been educated as I have been, and allowed, as her natural right, the liberty I have had, and when she has read whatever has excited her interest on sociology and — well, many other kindred subjects, she thinks out, as a man does of a woman, what she would

like in a husband — and she makes her choice even if it be a purely ideal one, beforehand, quite irrespective of proposals, just as he does. It is the only thing she can do — as it is the only thing he can do. And she can't help her love, as he can't his, when circumstances are favorable."

"And you do not love me?"

The look she gave him was one of shrinking regret. She was measuring his hurt by what her own might have been. "No," she said, in a low, convincing tone, "I do not love you, and yet I care a great deal for you."

He turned to the window. His lips were set. His eyes were cold. He counted the ferries and tugs on the river with stupid precision. Then he counted them over. He estimated the height of the various church towers in sight.

He turned suddenly back to her.

"Do you love some one else?"

There was a startled, softened expansion of her eyes, changing to an indignant protest. What right had he to ask such a question! And then her whole being seemed to glow — to take on dignity and sweetness.

"Do you?" he insisted, with a wounded persistency, conquering her reticence.

"Yes — I do."

He felt the utter finality of it all, thus unconsciously setting her apart from his general conception of her sex. He rebelled from her point of view — from the deliberation and foresight and activity of will it implied before she would let herself surrender to a passionate love. It knocked in pieces his notions of the passivity of woman, and the power of a man to conquer, sooner or later, the woman of his choice. And yet, strangely enough, she had never seemed so fascinating to him, so largely dowered with those possibilities and actualities which go to make married life either a heaven or a hell.

He turned towards her again with a heavy sigh.

"Were you about going home when we met?"

"I had just come. I wish to visit the houses facing on the upper street before leaving."

"If you will excuse me," studiously regarding his watch, "I would like to try to keep an appointment down town."

She held out her hand, and again the scent of the violets, like a promise of spring, of summer, of love, smote his senses. He took it, holding it, turning it over in his own, and looking at it. Drawing another heavy sigh as he relinquished it, he went away without further words.

Susanna continued her inspection of the building, but it was mechanical and perfunctory. Her mind was on other things, and when she started home, her thoughts, her feelings, were in that surging, rapid whirl of ebb and flow which comes when some accident has precipitated a crisis.

In the avowal she had made to Hillerton, she had crossed the line of indecision concerning Catherwood. She longed to see him, to let him know by act or look the depth of her love. Everything shrank into insignificance at the thought of him. Her whole being, now that it had broken through its barriers, set towards him in a torrent of rejoicing. Surrender at length meant solely possession.

She knew him, beforehand, as the kind of man who would promise all and ask nothing but her love—and now, suddenly, her love went out to meet his, willing, glad, eager also to offer all, to give all, to lavish herself upon him. She thought of his ambitions, of some of her own akin to his. His was the larger, fuller, more useful outside life at present. She would make her ambitions subservient to the good he was doing—to the power for righteousness he was building up. If she entered into his life, she would add to it, not diminish it, by every energy of her nature. It might take her longer to accomplish certain purposes of her own with him than without him; but a little more or less time, what did it matter? And what was all that life contained with him left out! The personal matters she most cared for would, after all, simply be held in abeyance. He was not the kind of man who absorbed, belittled, reduced, people to his own measure. His ambition was not, like Peter's, like Hillerton's, ambition for money, for self-aggrandizement, but for the evolution of mind and character—for the betterment of the world.

Every sentiment, every ideal, which she had hitherto cherished, became enshrined in her sentiment for Cather-

wood, in her conception of his ideals. Her love sang to him with a glad confidence of rejoicing out of the depths of her woman's heart, and whatever was good or beautiful or true seemed possible only as she might walk beside him in the closest of all relations.

But with her, as with the rest of humanity, as soon as she knew what she wanted, circumstances proved fortuitous and baffling.

Catherwood's time and energy, and apparently his entire thought, turned at this crisis to his church, his reforms, and the various city organizations of which he had become a part. His name was one of the watchwords of progress. The daily papers chronicled his movements, his sayings, his sermons. Sunday after Sunday the Calvin Memorial was crowded, till even the aisles were packed with listeners. There was a burning energy of tone, of expression, a plain, ringing, spiritual eloquence of conviction in his sermons that made men and women go home to study the Bible anew, in order to find out for themselves the source of his illumination.

Night after night, in the window of his study, the light burned till midnight, as he pored over his books, digging out with a tireless honesty and persistency the individual and comparative import of the Scriptures. There was an originality, a richness, a force of meaning in many of the chapters and themes, as he analyzed them, startling to a few hearers, but refreshing and charming to the multitude.

The new choir lent graciousness and æsthetic harmony to the worship. The deacons and trustees, excited and pleased, and with a general feeling of prosperity over the rental of every pew, accepted the completed plans for alterations and enlargement without qualification, making arrangements, as soon as spring opened, to transfer the services to a hall in the neighborhood.

Sunday after Sunday, Catherwood preached and Susanna listened, her cheeks flushed, her heart burning with pride and love. Sometimes their eyes met, his shining with a seer's fervor, hers softening with immediate sympathy and recognition. But a change, natural and inevitable, having come over the evenings they and Hillerton had spent together, while the church plans were in progress, and Mrs. Dutton being now in a stage

of weakness, the hurried visits which the minister paid weekly had to be spent in her room, and a veil of silence and hindrance seemed to drop between the lovers.

As for Catherwood, unmindful as he appeared, he knew, at last, that the hour of his gladness had come. But he knew, also, how the fever had grown in his own veins with the waiting, and that her love, if deliberate, was like a slowly kindling but deeply built and hotly glowing fire which would burn on and on into a white heat, and it was then that he meant to speak to her.

He was unkind to her without intending to be so, and back of his tardiness, back of the stern repression he was putting upon his own desires and pleasure, was the thought of Vroom and Hillerton. He had now but to reach out his hand and take what had been denied them, and a strange, half-feminine delicacy prompted him to spare them as long as possible from a state of affairs which, while not actual, might seem to them indefinite and intangible.

Meanwhile, as the winter faded into spring, and warm, languorous days followed in interminable succession, the strain and hurt and loyal suppression of a perplexing doubt began to sap Susanna's energy.

One Sunday, as Catherwood was giving out the last hymn, and his eyes rested briefly on her, he noticed her pallor and a slenderness of figure which made him doubt his senses.

At this instant, she looked up, and, her swift instinct reading his surprise, there was a haughty drop of her chin, a proud straightening of her shoulders, and a far-away, cold gaze which by this time he knew too well to misunderstand.

He joined in the singing and stopped. He could not withhold himself from looking at her again. She was singing, apparently, with her whole soul, the effort bringing her color back, and he wondered if his solicitude had deceived his senses.

Under his mute inquiry, her endurance had broken down. A reaction followed.

What she had feared was true. He had the universal failing of all men much before the public. He was cold-hearted and hard-hearted. He would not be so successful if he were not. She had been guilty of the very folly

which she had abjured when she was younger—and wiser. She had let herself love before she was ready to do so, and a man, moreover, who had always taken her too much for granted.

In the afternoon she went to bed with a headache, dismaying Mrs. Dutton to such an extent that she had no further privacy. She remained home from church in the evening.

Long before morning, she reached a conclusion. She would go up to the farm to inspect the cottage. Two or three days spent in roaming over the fields and through the woods, and in the midst of the large, sweet solitude of the ledges and pine groves, would restore her sense of freedom.

Like a prisoner waiting for the time of his release, she waited through the weary hours of the night to flee from her misery and herself.

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN, late on the following afternoon, Susanna drove up the long lane leading to Caty Ann's, she surprised herself by her own cheerfulness.

The spring came more slowly in those mountain regions, but the maples had already shed their blossoms and the young leaves made a feathery haze of green against the warm sky. There was the faint crude scent of dandelions, for the thick, new grass was golden with them. And the little brook, leading under the milk-house, was full of water, clear and rapid as a trout-stream.

Mrs. Van Voorhies was leaning over the lower half of the door, her quick ear, in that solitary spot, having long ago heard the sound of approaching wheels. She welcomed Susanna from afar, stepping out in her gayly flowered carpet slippers on the flagging in front of the door as the buggy drove up, and assisting her visitor to alight.

"Woll, ef dis ain't a s'prise! I never spected to see you a-comin' dis way agin with de birds. We wus a-countin' up dis wery arternoon, my man an' me, when you'd be likely to open de new house. I s'pose de house is what brought you up now. Dere ain't nothin' like it in dese pairts, 'cept de tilin' an' de fireplaces. You've ben extravagant on winders, S'anna. So many of dem an' sech big ones! An' doors, too, plenty an' to spare! What's your idee in buildin' sech a draughty place, — eh?" and she led the way inside, where the peace, the snug comfort, and the beds looked as undisturbed as ever.

Susanna drew a sigh of satisfaction, surprising Caty Ann with an extra kiss. "It all seems so sweet and homely and simple! Yes, I have come to look after the new house, and I want to stay two or three days.

You must let me sleep here at night, and fix up a lunch for me, so that I can spend most of the time on the farm. I just want to roam about and live out of doors, and make believe I have never gone away from the old place." Her color faded and she drew a tired breath.

Mrs. Van Voorhies looked at her sharply. "You've ben a-losin' flesh, S'anna. You're jes' es prurttly es ever, but you're a-lookin' older. I've always heern tell det York wears folks to skin-an'-bones an' teks ten years off'n deir lives. What you want is some of our Dutch livin' an' mountain air. Dere ain't nothin' like dis spot, enyway, in de hull world. It's good 'nough fer me, es long es I live. But I ain't asked 'bout Mis' Dutton. How doos she find herself dis spring? Is she a-takin' enyt'ing to keep her up? We've jes' ben havin' a round of sulphur an' m'lasses—the hull on us. P'haps it's what you need."

She laughed. "Possibly. You were asking about grandmamma. She's poorly," relapsing into the colloquialism of the neighborhood. "She wants to come up the river as soon as the house is finished."

Her listener's face beamed with complacency and sympathy. "She's jes' like ev'rybody else det goes away. Dey all come back sooner or later."

Susanna's eyes had fallen on a letter lying on the window-sill. "This is Nicholas Storm's handwriting, I see, Mrs. Van Voorhies. Do you hear good news from him?"

"You ken read it while I'm a-gittin' supper. He must be doin' splendid an' hevin' a fine time. Nick'll come out top o' de heap, yet. An' so Mis' Dutton's poorly. Woll, she's a-gittin' along in years, but I'm sorry to hear it. What d'you want fer supper, Susanna? Ef your mouth's fixed on enyt'ing in partick'lar, speak right out."

"If you would give me a bowl of mush-and-milk—"

"Det's what my man always asks fer ef he's a leetle down—or else buttermilk. He jes' drinks buttermilk mornin', noon, an' night, an' it doos seem to bring him up." She bustled about with the eager delight of a woman whose hospitality is seldom taxed.

After supper, and while Caty Ann was putting her house in order for the night, Susanna walked up and down the lane.

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The wide, sweet solitude, the fragrant, cool air, the plaintive, lonesome trill of the frogs, and the occasional belated twitter of a bird, at once soothed and quickened her heart. Memory had the poignant awakening which only age or love can produce. She saw Catherwood in the little old red schoolhouse; she saw him holding Janey, helping Mrs. Dutton in those distant days of never-ending work, carrying her picka-back to and from school, writing to her, directing her school-life—believing in her, hoping for her, stimulating her, loving her! his influence the one continuous, golden thread of her whole life; and she had intended to snap it, to do without him, to read more law, to begin some new art or science, to fossilize herself into mind alone, to lose the larger for the smaller freedom, to distort her vision of life by a one-sided experience.

She stretched out her arms; she looked up at the mountains; and her attitude and her expression were in themselves a caress.

She slept long and dreamlessly that night, buried in the middle of four feather-beds piled one on top of the other, the mountain air blowing through the open windows and sighing down the wide chimney like the combined expostulation of the generations of Dutch men and women who had occupied her chamber.

Soon after breakfast, a "blicky" in her hand, filled with as great a variety and quantity of food as Caty Ann could pack into the tin pail, she started on the familiar, unchanged highway towards her former home.

As she drew near, the cheerful sound of hammers broke the stillness, and, presently, like a tall child looking over a parent's shoulder, she saw a gable of the new house rising above the apple trees and dominating the roof of the shabby, gray homestead. But the throb of feeling quickening her heart was not for the new house, but for the old,—a loose clapboard, flapping back and forth in the wind, hurting her as the broken arm of a baby might a mother.

She lingered long enough to go up into the little doorway. The winter had continued the work of previous ones. Great holes pierced the sod, rain and frost having completed the decay of some of the wooden foundations. Pools of water in the room below glimmered sullenly as

she glanced down. With a sigh of mingled regret and sadness, she passed around under the locusts into the orchard.

As she ascended the slight rise, and felt the soft turf beneath her feet, and caught her first broad glimpse of the new house, with every scaffold taken down, and its wide piazzas and big windows looking warm and sunshiny in the open space, a proud sense of ownership, such as she had never experienced before, stole over her. The past shrank out of sight behind the present, and the future opened radiant with hope and youth and love.

The painters were already at work in the upper rooms. Plumbers and carpenters were busy everywhere.

She walked to the front, where the piazza was broad enough for a room.

The creek, swollen with the spring rains, rushed along, a foaming, tumbling mass of turbid waters. The ledges of the knoll stood out gray and bold, their rough surface dotted with tufts of fern and grass waving gayly in the wind. The pine trees, with that strange new look all nature takes on in spring, chanted a requiem and a prophecy of resurrection. She thought with tenderness, half a regret and half an anticipation, of the loss and compensation of life. The loves buried on the knoll remained with her like a recent and vivid dream, but, compared with the loves which the new house would shelter, they were like moonlight to sunlight. A big apple tree stood close by. Stretching out her hand and pulling down a branch, she examined the delicate new leaves and the clusters of buds already streaked with pink. What a bower of bloom the house would stand in, a fortnight later!

The "boss" carpenter now joined her. "We've been wanting to see you, Miss Kildare. The contract says tiling for the big balcony that's to give you a view of the mountains. Tiling won't stand no time in this climate, unless you enclose the balcony, and that would spoil it, to my notion. Will you please come up-stairs with me? I would like to see if you don't think we'd better floor it with hard wood."

She crossed her very own door-sill with a breath of expectancy. She went up the wide, low stairs, broken by landings, thinking what they would mean to her

grandmother. The upper doors stood open on a gallery leading around a hall two stories in height, and she saw with delight that the fireplaces with their Scriptural tilings so characteristic of the neighborhood were already finished. When she went out on the balcony, the grandeur and joyousness of the scene smote her with a happy pain. The mountains stretched across the west in regal Tyrian splendor, their bountiful sweep and majestic altitude softened by drifts of snowy fog sinking into tiny valleys and anon rising with the stately, gliding motion of majestic swans.

Having assented to the change the carpenter proposed, she explored the house with a sense of freedom, isolation, and leisure, as novel after the tense life of the city as it was exhilarating.

She wandered through the orchard, and over to the knoll and back again to the older house; she did not want to go inside this day, but a queer feeling of loyalty besetting her, she compromised matters with herself by sitting down on the step of the parlor door to eat her lunch. She opened the "blicky," and smiled over the layers of cake and pie, of pickles and cheese, of cold meat and bread and butter, shaking her head dissentingly at sight of a jar of milk as thick as cream. A half-hour later she smiled from a different appreciation, for absolutely nothing was left of that lunch but a few scattered crumbs.

Thrusting the pail under a bush till her return, she started towards the barn. It was in a state of sad dilapidation, and it took all her strength to swing open one of the heavy, sagging doors. The interior was poverty-stricken enough. But the faint odor of hay and grain, the sight of nooks she had not thought of in years, restored segments of the past so vividly that she forgot where she was. She was a child again, in reality, — a simple, unambitious girl, whose outward vision was bounded by mountains and forests, whose highest conception of social grandeur was Domine and Madame Baltus, whose world of romance lay hidden under the rafters of an attic, whose literary and historic proclivities were bounded by Washington Irving and the tales of her grandfather.

Leaning against the time-worn, empty stalls, her

thoughts roamed back and forth with the intensity of childish vision and appreciation. And now Catherwood glided into the picture, and every hard line took on a richness of color, a softness of contour. Gradually the vision grew, changed, and she saw him through her pride as well as her love, through her nobility of spirit as well as the egotism of her passion — a thinker, an actor on the stage of life, a man of big aspirations and enthusiasms for humanity; a man who looked to her for comradeship, as well as sympathy; a man who treated her as if she were strong as men are strong, enduring, patient, tenacious; a man who never would and never could narrow himself to relations primarily based on instinct; but a man to whom every tie, however personal, must be beautified and uplifted by the spiritual element.

Such a man loved her! she loved him! Promises, words, even the living presence, dear as this might be, were not vital to such a love. It wrapped her about like the embrace of light; it lifted her up like the song of a meadow-lark; it sent her blood thrilling through her veins like the scent of a rose; it bathed her in a tide of emotion and bliss like the touch of a breeze after a hot and parching day.

The sunshine flickered down through a hundred holes in the roof, touching with gold the lines of atomy dust her entrance had set in motion. It lay in a broad, yellow streak at her feet and mottled her with light and shadow. The breeze whispered through the chinks and crannies, and called like a lover so full of feeling that his words were a sigh. The voice of the creek, softened by the distance, soothed like the mellow, deep boom of an organ. The silence throbbed with sound and the varied sounds with silence.

She sighed and closed her eyes. If she had been a theosophist, she might have believed that she was entering Davachan.

A rapid step on the uneven floor invaded her dreams and solitude at once. She opened her eyes with a look of startled, dreamy surprise.

Catherwood was advancing towards her, his face a blaze of joy, of invitation, of entreaty. He came nearer, and, as he did so, held out his arms to her. She gave a glad, long cry — reaching out her own — and the next

instant her thought, longing, anticipation, trust, hope, pride, were obliterated, blended, consummated, renewed, in the eager, strong clasp of a love which had had the force to wait, to restrain itself, to subject itself to all that was noblest and purest in himself and her.

They walked out hand in hand from their homely surroundings, softened and beautified by the tender veil of spring and their own happiness.

The cart-track, now overgrown with grass, and over which the bridge of Mirzah to the barn gable still showed a storm-swept skeleton, invited them to the shadow of the ledge and on towards the butternuts against the old garden wall, and still on to the creek where it rushed in a smooth, deceptive current above a broad bed of slaty rock, over which still remained the rude bridge Nicholas had built for her so long ago.

They crossed the creek and sought a wild cherry tree growing out of an abutment of the ledge. Its delicate tufts of leaves shook signals to them, and they stood under its straggling boughs and clasped its bent trunk, twisted to one side by its exposed position and precarious foothold, as glad to see it as if it had a voice to welcome them and rejoicing with it that it was still alive, renewed by its returning sap to a fresh youth in the glad spring. One after the other they sought out other trees which Susanna loved and about which she had woven her childish fancies. She talked her ardor to them indirectly, and Catherwood, happy as some Greek who had wooed and won a Dryad, read beneath her tender tones and caressing words to oaks but lately stripped of faithful leaves which had clung to them all winter, or vines which the wind had torn loose from their support, the depth of her feeling for him.

And what were words to the touch of her hand in his, or the radiant, joyous glance of her eye, when he challenged it by some question of how her love was born and had grown until it was wholly his—to be his through time and change—always!

When the workmen had gone, they wandered over the new house together. They stood outside the old one, recalling her childhood and the stern conditions of his youth. A clump of lilacs in royal bloom brushed against the window of his former room, and breaking off a bunch,

he handed it to her. The air was full of fragrance from the locusts, and they lingered under the venerable trees clad in white as if for a bridal.

They were loath to go, to make the necessary, rhythmical pause in the poetry of their lives. But the sun was near the tops of the mountains, the walk to Caty Ann's was a long one, and Catherwood must take supper there and persuade Janse to drive him to Klacs in time to board the night train to New York.

The white turnpike lost its glare, and a soft haze of warmth and budding leaves lent an ethereal charm to the landscape. They passed the heavy stone wall bounding the Storm homestead, leaning over it a few minutes to enjoy the grassy fragrance of the rank, uncut meadow, and the lonely dignity of the clump of hickories in front of the low stone house. When they came to the dip in the road, which so often had given the child Susanna a heartache as some loved one disappeared from sight, she paused a moment, looked back, then forward, and held out her hand to Catherwood.

"We go on together, henceforth," he said, and drew her to him and kissed her. He held her hand till they had descended the ledgy slope—and the sweet fern, whose waxy, rich green leaves were shining in pristine freshness, sent forth greetings of mountain incense.

Caty Ann had come to the end of the lane to look for her visitor, for the shadows were already beginning to lurk along the stone walls and under the trees. When she saw the minister, she held up both hands.

"Why, Mr. Catherwood, where'd you drop from? You must a come es sudden es an April shower. But I'm glad to see you—raal glad!"

She looked shrewdly and scrutinizingly at his companion, but her remarks were practical. "You're tanned es brown es a nut. You ought to a wore a sunbunnit. August ain't nothin' to compare with May fer tannin'. You've spiled your complexion!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Susanna, in genuine dismay, "I have forgotten the blicky."

"Where'd you leave it?" asked Caty Ann, with thrifty interest.

"Under a bush in the dooryard."

"Never mind. 'Tain't much account, no more. I'll

mek Tim git up airly an' fetch it home. He's so lazy, it'll do him good." She led the way back, asking many skilful questions, and gratified beyond measure with the minister's willingness to afford her the most ample information.

After supper, while Janse was hitching up and she stood listening with approving delight, the teapot in one hand, a plate of cheese in the other, she was informed of the engagement.

"An' you hed to come up here to git it done! I like det, I do! I hope it'll bind you so fast to de ole place, you'll never git loose. It wus wuth gittin' tanned fer, wusn't it, Susanna? But you mustn't spile your complexion like det agin. I'll mek you a slat sunbunnit fer when you come back nex' mont'. Dem's de best kind fer keepin' out de sun." Depositing the teapot and plate of cheese, she held out her hand. Something formal was necessary. "I wish you j'y, Mr. Catherwood. I'm glad you aire a-goin' to git a good man, Susanna." She paused irresolutely, adding, with some anxiety and much solicitude: "I hear Janse a-comin' wid de buggy. I don't want to hender you, Mr. Catherwood, but Janse'd tek it very kind, he would, ef you'd lead us in prayer before you go."

As there was abundance of time, the prayer was as deliberate and comprehensive as she could desire. Long after, she loved to tell of how he asked blessings on everything.

"His prayer wus jes' wonderful. It wus es full of thanksgivin' es a hymn-book, an' he spoke right out 'bout Susanna to de Lord in a way det made me wish I wus young agin."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE Calvin Memorial was not completed till the following December.

Meanwhile, the orchard cottage had been opened and occupied.

Catherwood spent his vacation on the old farm, preaching, one hot August Sunday, to the edification of the community for miles around. Another Sunday, he divided the duties and shared the honors with Domine Baltus in the Evangelical Dutch Reformed Church. The domine and his wife made Mrs. Dutton a long visit. Caty Ann came often, also, to pass the day.

Altogether, the staid neighborhood, with its inflexible customs and prudent, hoarding manner of life, took kindly to Miss Kildare's innovations, and talked over, half in pride, half with judicious criticism, her hired help, "which she wusn't a bit afeerd to call servants," her horses, "kep' jes' fer kerriage ridin'," and her "fashin of puttin' on two differ'nt dresses ev'ry day, one fer mornin' and another fer afternoon."

But she made herself one with the people; better, she was one of them, and the consciousness of her desire to maintain former relations, the appreciation of her tea-parties, a propitiating mixture of the neighborhood customs with others from "York," and a general opportunity thus afforded for the women to air their best gowns and prunella gaiters and the men to inspect the new stable and its high-priced fancy stock, helped her to stand well with young and old.

To the old, she gave the opportunity for reproof when children were fickle or hard-hearted, and to eager-eyed and longing youth opened a door through which they caught glimpses of the big, outside world. Moreover, in the estimation of that sequestered folk, she was about

to enter a Brahminic caste which in a manner lifted her above criticism. The status of a minister still remained lofty, an impregnable fortification to be regarded with awe and approached with reverence. The community felt lifted above itself, so to speak, with Domine Baltus again in their midst, and an additional minister, famous too, at that, hobnobbing with them over farming, the price of land, the school-tax, infant salvation, once in grace always in grace, and a hundred other absorbing themes.

Mrs. Dutton seemed to glide into an Indian summer of revery, contentment, and health. She was having that rare experience of the aged, — an aftermath of the blossoming of springtime.

Nevertheless, although everybody spoke of it as a happy summer, the months glided away, the leaves fell, the winds grew cold, the farmers began to hibernate beside the fire, their wives to knit woollen stockings, and Susanna to long for the city.

Catherwood's letters, also, urged her return, and thus it happened that, a premature snow whitening the mountains, the storm-doors were put up, the north and east windows were boarded, and the old house, about which there had been many an anxious conversation as to what to do with it, was overlooked with more than ordinary care and solicitude, but a decision concerning its fate postponed. Before the weather had time to change or even send forth a flag of truce, the farm relapsed into the silence of winter and the city house resumed its suspended life.

Susanna's patience and generosity had abundant taxing during the month between her return and her marriage, for Catherwood found time to see her only by compressing correspondence and sermon writing into hours usually devoted to sleep. He was straining every nerve to put his numerous affairs into good shape preparatory to the fortnight's absence after the wedding.

Not that she was not engrossed with new gowns and bonnets and the multitudinous paraphernalia of a bride's wardrobe, for she was. But she was content to choose, direct, convince herself that everything was progressing, and then turn her thoughts elsewhere. She visited the tenements, now finished and slowly filling with a hetero-

geneous mixture of families of all races and qualities; but these visits consumed only a fraction of her leisure. She did not study; she tried to — but the study, for the first time in her life, seemed merely a preparation, an initiation, and, at this crisis, a weariness to the flesh. She was, above all else, thoughtful.

Many of Catherwood's parishioners called on her, and their visits afforded a preliminary idea of what it might mean to be a minister's wife. She began to know something of the pressure of opinion under which her lover existed. Occasionally, she felt depressed; again, she was enthusiastically happy or sympathetic in listening to the hopes, fears, heartaches, in connection with the Calvin Memorial, poured into her ears. She received a great deal of advice so indirectly and diplomatically administered, that sometimes she was simply astonished; at others, she set it aside with an open independence or unqualified dissent variously received, according as the advisers wished to be leaders or find one.

Catherwood had asked her to join his church. Two of the elders and several of the members had expressed the hope that she would not delay doing so. But even to her lover, her minister, as she liked to call him, she did not talk freely on this subject. She spoke of herself as a Christian to them all; once or twice, she said she did not see her way clearly to being a sectarian.

This peculiar position in one who would be so situated as to exercise a controlling influence over the young people in the church made a flutter of adverse criticism — but the old men shook their heads sagely, saying Catherwood would control all that by and by; and some of the women said that when he was her head, as Christ was the head of the church, she would obey his wishes as a matter of course.

She was so big, so handsome, so radiant, so feminine, even though read in law, she had such a fortune in prospect, that, altogether, the minister received the most honest and flattering congratulations, and his choice of a wife was commented upon with the same shrewd approval given to his sermons, business ability, and learning.

As for the two most concerned, they had made each other no promises, outside of the mutual acknowledgment of their love. She had chosen him with her per-

ception of his quality of manliness, and she could trust him for the rest. He was taking her into his work, his life, his power, knowing that with her keenness of perception, her loyalty to her friends, her eager, receptive mind, and a genius for affairs constantly and intuitively seeking expression, he had nothing to fear either from her indiscretion or ambition. There was, it is true, a quality in her which the church sometimes denominated worldliness, but which he called to himself her healthy and ready capacity for enjoyment. If she were practical, she was no less romantic, and underneath her interest in the pomp and show of life, there was a vein of profound spirituality which years and further experience and some new, quick, searching flash of divine light might open and reveal to others in the richness and beauty that he knew existed. Honesty of nature was her birthright, and in this, he believed, lay, after all, the gist of her character.

Occasionally, in these days, when his thoughts brooded over her in all possible relations, he had a perception of a consistent shrinking on her part from the polity of a church which in theory, if not altogether in act, set the seal of its disapproval on the most rudimentary liberty for women outside of the home. But he was a man also, who never took up absolute issues till the time was ripe for them, or until some pressing example brought them into the immediate field of action. The woman question was still a question of the future, although the educational opportunities being opened to the sex was the first fanfare of trumpets of which the general public seemed strangely unmindful.

And what man could be expected on the eve of marriage to philosophize very clearly on his future wife's relations to the church, or humanity, or even on what her course of action might be when it did not lie parallel with his; it ended, every single time, in Catherwood's case, in the thrill from a memory of some word, some look, some caress which, for the moment, put a stop to thought and rendered feeling supreme. She was his; he was hers — to rejoice together, to suffer together, to triumph together, to be humiliated together; the name, the fortune, the happiness, the status of the one to be at the mercy, the wisdom, the justice of the other. They would

no longer be two persons, but one, and so much stronger or so much weaker, according to the strength or weakness not of one but both. He was appalled at times over the responsibility, the constancy, the sacredness, such a dissolution of two personalities into unity implied. It involved a mystery, awful, beautiful, indissoluble, akin to that of the Trinity.

Finally, the day of the wedding arrived — clear, cold, with a sparkle of icicles along doors and windows, and the brilliant, dazzling sunlight of January.

Susanna, in white, with a delicate flush on her cheeks, and a glow in her eye as if this were the day of her coronation, met Catherwood with an ecstasy of soul, a proud elation, a mystical excess of emotion, as if she embodied the New Jerusalem. The minister stepped forward to receive her with the look on his face it wore at the administration of the sacrament.

As they came together, and Domine Baltus, venerable with years, his massive features and imperious presence imbued with tenderness, began the ceremony, a great silence fell upon the Calvin Memorial.

The marbles and mosaics of the beautiful interior glowed in the mellow light diffused everywhere. Palms and flowers decked the space in front of the pulpit, and the vast organ pealed notes of triumphant love. Men and women, even children, watched the progress of the wedding, as if it were strung to some key of novelty and beauty that they must not fail to comprehend.

Noted ministers stood back of Domine Baltus, coming forward as occasion required to aid in the service.

The bridesmaids and groomsmen looked on forgetful that they had a part to play.

The church was crowded to the galleries. Everybody was there.

Social leaders regarded Susanna with glances at once wistful and inquisitorial; for, underneath her superb dignity, there was a royal warmth enhancing her beauty and veiling the sterner qualities of her nature. As Catherwood's wife, she would be a new force to reckon upon, a new planet to take rank among the rest.

Sewing-women and shop-girls, clerks and mechanics, students and teachers, bankers and merchants, florists and musicians, doctors and lawyers, artists and authors, had flocked to this wedding.

Something in the air, something in the quality of the grand old domine's expression, something in the manner in which the bride and groom spoke their vows, made all, however self-centred, sordid, romantic, disillusioned, careless or careworn, giddy or thoughtful, think more nobly than their wont and wish the pair long life and happiness. Everybody felt like a friend; everybody rejoiced, recognizing a marriage of lovers.

It was Susanna who had insisted on a reception so large that none could possibly feel excluded. Each member of the church was personally invited.

"You belong to me, yet you belong to your church, to the world. It is not only our wedding; it is theirs. If we are to rejoice with our people, to sorrow with them in their sorrows, we must let them rejoice with us, and, if our hearts ever bleed, theirs, too, will ache in sympathy."

Catherwood kissed her, half in reverence, half in triumph, as she thus loyally stepped across the threshold of her previous exclusiveness into the democracy of his calling.





PART FIFTH. — LATE SUMMER



CHAPTER I

SEVERAL years after their marriage, Catherwood and his wife sat one morning in an immense room at the top of their house.

"I have done my best, Louis, directly and indirectly, to influence Hillerton, but he has no regard for my opinion."

"And you used to have unbounded influence with him!"

"Ah!" She smiled reflectively. "He was my lover then. He has hardly been my friend since. He tolerates me because of you."

The minister wrinkled his brow whimsically. "Hillerton has limitations. He hasn't a magnanimous nature — that goes without saying. But he has great force of purpose, he never disguises his motives, and, on the whole, means well. I do not know what I should have done without him the past six years. He has backed me in most of my church projects, and never misinterprets me. Barton thinks him the keenest and shrewdest financier on our board; he says there is a standing joke among business men that when Hillerton feels religious, they all go down town earlier than usual. Moral law in business appears to have absolutely no weight with him, and yet he is perfectly sincere in the conviction that his conduct deserves the praise of men and the approval of God. But, take him all in all, there is not a man in the church for whom I have a greater respect, and it seems like instituting action against 'mine own familiar friend' to call him before the session."

Susanna reached across the table and took his hand, her face softening with love and sympathy.

"His tenements are a standing menace to society," continued Catherwood. "They were bad enough six years ago, God knows, but they are infinitely worse

to-day. Jews and Italians are crowded together like rats in a sewer; the saloons in his houses are scattered through the foulest regions of the city. The aggregate of his rents from these two sources alone makes a fine income. Repairs and improvements on his East side property are things unknown. I have succeeded in organizing the principal churches of the city in favor of tenement reform and have thoroughly aroused the new Board of Health. But right here in my own church, among my own elders and deacons, this sort of thing continues."

"There must be something in 'Presbyterian Law and Usage' to meet such a condition." Picking up a little black book lying at her elbow, she examined it in silence for a few minutes. "Have you thought of calling attention to Section 697?" she inquired. "Ruling elders are asked, when elected," she read aloud, "'Do you promise to study the peace, unity, and purity of the church?'"

"They would say they had."

"Surely not the purity!" she exclaimed, her eyes kindling with astonished seriousness. "See here," she continued, her countenance brightening. "Listen to Section 789. It seems quite new—made only two or three years ago. Sessions must 'guard carefully the purity of the church by refusing to admit to membership or to retain those in her pale who are engaged in the manufacture or sale of intoxicating liquors as a beverage or who derive their livelihood from this sinful traffic.'"

"That wouldn't apply to Hillerton."

"The last clause would—'who derive their livelihood from this sinful traffic.'"

"Perhaps, indirectly."

"It is enough to make a case of—especially when joined to Section 697. Here is something else," reading on with increasing force and animation. "The general assemblies of 1818, 1866, and 1877 took a stand to the effect 'that total abstinence from all intoxicating drinks as a beverage is demanded from every Christian by the condition of society, the purity of the church, and the Word of God.'"

"Do you realize, Susanna, that in our own church, on the list of our own members, are two brewers, one retired wholesale wine merchant, one grocer who keeps in

stock the best and poorest wines and liquors, and ten men whose tenements are devoted to reprehensible purposes? It is a serious matter, so serious that, for six years, I have used my personal influence with those actively engaged in these things to dissuade them, but in vain; I have also disparaged social power growing out of wealth acquired from such sources, and with just as poor results. My work in New York in these essentials has absolutely no showing among our own membership. As for total abstinence among Presbyterians!" he waved his hand despairingly.

"But see how much you have done in other respects," she said proudly. "You have built up the Sunday-school from a handful of poor children to a school of hundreds drawn from all our families; you have gathered about you a following of men — young, middle-aged, and old — who hang on your words as if you were a prophet. You have practically rebuilt and beautified the church and freed it from debt, relieving the deacons from anxiety concerning the annual income; and" — elation and love and tenderness surcharging her voice — "you are the most eloquent man in the city. And you know, as I do, that you have visited the widow and the fatherless in their affliction, and been seen far more frequently in the homes of the poor than the rich. You have even found time," smiling, "to pore over your books like a mediæval monk."

He began to walk up and down the room, her eyes following him with furtive anxiety.

His appearance already indicated the stress of his life and the burning energy of his spirit. His hair was gray. His eyes were keener and more deeply set. The hollows in his temples were veined. His entire expression was enthusiastic but repressed, calm yet eager. As he walked, his arms hanging at his side, he clasped and unclasped his hands; occasionally he sighed. There was a tremendous tension about him. He was like an electric battery to sensitive natures, stimulating, impelling, and imbuing them with additional nervous force.

He had begun to have sleepless nights, to see double, to require food immediately before and after sustained intellectual exertion, to have attacks of sudden and exhausting fatigue, to feel that his work was a failure, and that in some inscrutable way, unknown to himself, he

lacked the wisdom that his talents required, and the poise necessary to the steadily enlarging demands upon his strength.

And Susanna, who had never had a really ill day in her life, could but dimly comprehend these signs of weakening vitality. Sometimes she coaxed, sometimes gently chided, but oftener stimulated him to renewed effort. As she sat there watching him, and still at the high tide of her own strength, she experienced her first revulsion from the meaning of life, the first warning surge of youthful passion, vigor, and the instinct of health against the decline of force, the struggle for existence along higher lines. Heretofore, the stir, the resistance, the defeats, the triumphs of life, had seemed immensely worth while. Now, suddenly, while watching her husband, dearer to her than life itself, which she loved so well, she unexpectedly felt the hoarding conservatism of one who fears to lose what he has already won—the strange, new fear of the man or woman who catches a vision of old age, measuring the years which are left by those which have vanished.

Catherwood himself, who, until recently, had had the strength to do everything he had willed to do, to keep every engagement to the very letter of the spirit, but half understood how tired he was. No longer altogether able to kindle under his own stimulus, he turned to his wife for the necessary fuel, and thus far she had fed the fire without compunction.

"Come and sit down beside me," drawing a chair towards her.

He did so with a kind of hurried reluctance, although regarding her fondly and reverently.

"Suppose we take a holiday," she said, caressing his cheek. "We haven't gone away together in so long! Only for a day or two," she added, seeing the wistful dissent in his face.

He put his arm about her, and she laid her head on his shoulder.

"Oh, I wish we could, I wish we could! But—we can't!" He began walking again. Then, glancing at her and struck with a far-away sadness in her manner, he asked: "Is anything the matter, Susanna? Are you tired, too?"

She smiled a little, sitting very still and thoughtful. "I think I need a change."

"I will see about it this very day. Where do you want to go?"

"Oh, I couldn't go without you."

He sat down beside her again. "I'll tell you what we will do," he said, after a moment of troubled silence. "If I have any kind of success in a matter I have had under contemplation, we will go away somewhere — when it is all settled. Before you spoke of the discipline, I had decided to read certain sections of 'Law and Usage' privately to Hillerton and several others; to warn them that I should, at a definite date, preach a sermon on reforms embodying the spirit of our laws and necessary for our particular church to institute, and that if I did not see some radical action taken by the Calvin Memorial towards purification from within outwards, I should bring the matter before the session, and push it, if I had to, to the presbytery, and thence to the General Assembly."

She squeezed his hand. "Leave all statistics to me. I will hunt them up and condense them for you. Where are you going?" as he rose hurriedly.

"To a young men's noon prayer-meeting down near Wall Street. The young men are tremendously stirred up just now over the eulogies on Jonas Burford, whose immoralities, wealth, and social position combined made him so conspicuous. I overheard a dozen sparring together over his goodness and meanness, his licentiousness and generosity. They wagered one another upon their ability to be such a compound, thirty years hence, reading pseudo-extracts from one another's funeral sermons, in which they eulogized themselves as examples to young men — as Jonas Burford was eulogized."

"I know the Man you will place before them!"

"A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; not the popular man these days, but He has held the centuries in His grasp, after all, and He will — He will! Good by," and he hurried away.

Susanna sat still and contemplative after her husband had gone, the noise of the city penetrating the closed windows and thick walls dully, like the monotonous rumble of a vast machine. She was dressed simply, but

there was the ineffaceable stamp of elegance in her general appearance—her mauve cloth gown, her linen cuffs and collar enhancing her clear, rich complexion, her round, full throat, her fine, strong hands. The room in which she lingered might have served as an epitome of many of the hours which she and Catherwood spent together. It was hardly a library; it was more a workroom, characteristic of both. Low cases ran around two sides of the wall, displaying a couple of shelves of battered college text-books, a row of lexicons in several languages, and numerous works of reference. One case held a miscellany of celebrated authors on science, sociology, law, architecture, and theology. There was a larger library down-stairs, but every book in this upper room represented hours or days or weeks of united study on first one theme and then another. Architectural sketches hung on the wall. There was a photograph of the old gray house at one end of the mantel and one of the orchard cottage at the other. Photographs of two children in flower-painted frames stood on the big table at which they had been sitting. The floor was bare except for skins before the fire and on either side of the table. A typewriter was on a stand beside Catherwood's chair. Magazines, a pile of new books, a mass of daily papers, and a basket of unanswered letters, all arranged in orderly confusion in front of Mrs. Catherwood, emphasized the atmosphere of the place.

As she sat there, thinking of her husband and his work, and with a solicitous thrill now and then as she wove together various indications of his hurry and fatigue, perceived before, but never in their true relation, the door opened and a baby girl toddled forward, followed by a boy of five. Every trace of care and seriousness vanished from her face. She held out her arms, the baby staggering into them with a scream of delight. Placing her little girl on her lap, she drew her boy towards her, kissing him with a large, serene pleasure. The children were dressed for their morning in the Park, and, before giving herself up to her full pleasure in them, she began to examine their hands and feet, their ears and faces, to see if they were in order.

The nurse now came in, a strong, middle-aged, responsible woman, and with some anxiety lest her charges

had disturbed their mother by rushing in so uncere-
moniously.

"They got away, ma'am, while I stepped out of the
room for a moment."

"It is nearly ten o'clock. I was not engaged. Did
you want to see your mamma so much!" She held her
baby to her breast, smothering the child with kisses
between little grunts of delight. "Mamma's precious
flower! Mamma's own spring posy!"

Every day, before the morning walk, a similar drama
was enacted, and this first reunion after breakfast was a
momentous occasion.

The nurse now took the children away, and a maid at
the same instant brought up some cards.

If Catherwood were encumbered with the multitudinous
demands upon him, his wife was often bewildered with
social and other claims pressing upon her. She managed
the minutiae of her life, as well as its larger responsibili-
ties, only by the most methodical disposition of her time.
But she was young, buoyant, ambitious, and happy, and
an overfull day was still like some happy puzzle, the
better, the more difficult to solve.

Her visitors were two large, elderly women, who
announced themselves a committee appointed by the
"Ladies' Christian Union" to wait upon her for the pur-
pose of inviting her to join with them in a series of
meetings which they were about to hold.

Now, Susanna's attention had recently been directed
so favorably to the "Ladies' Christian Union," that she
was glad of the opportunity extended to her. But before
committing herself, she asked a few questions.

"What do you purpose to do at these meetings?" she
inquired.

"Nothing," replied Mrs. Ashton, in the hurried, con-
ciliatory tone of the ultra-conservative woman, "not in
accordance with our church. I am a Presbyterian, too."

"But I am a Baptist," said her companion, with a
little raillery, "and we meet in a Congregational church."

"I was only thinking, my dear Mrs. Bowne," said Mrs.
Ashton, "that Mrs. Catherwood might fear that we were
asking her to join something of which Mr. Catherwood
wouldn't approve. But he does, for he spoke before us
one afternoon."

"Yes, he told me about it," said Susanna, reassuringly. "Mr. Catherwood, however, never assumes to say what I shall or shall not join. Is it a union of Presbyterian and Baptist ladies, then?"

"Of Christian ladies," said Mrs. Bowne, with decision. "Some of our most useful members are Episcopalians and Methodists; and the Dutch Reformed women are among our best speakers. We speak and pray and confer together on various subjects pertinent to Christianity. Our plan, we think, is going to spread, for we have visitors from all over the country. Ladies drop in every Wednesday from San Francisco or Washington, Savannah or Boston, as they happen to be in town."

"Doesn't the church cover the purpose of your association, though, in the weekly prayer-meetings?" inquired the minister's wife, tentatively.

"N-o," replied Mrs. Ashton, somewhat nervously, "for women don't have a chance—at least in our church; and it wouldn't be becoming or Scriptural, you know, for women to speak before the men."

"I never knew there was Scripture against it," said Mrs. Catherwood, ingenuously.

"My dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Ashton, in amazement. "Have you never read Corinthians? Don't you know what St. Paul says?"

"Oh, yes, of course," in a quiet, wondering tone, "I have read Corinthians; but the epistle is a letter that the apostle wrote to the wickedest people on the face of the earth in his time—a particular letter to a particular people, although containing spiritual truth valuable for all times. It wasn't safe in St. Paul's day, the men of Corinth being so wicked, you know, and the city a rendezvous for the depraved of both sexes, for good women to open themselves to misconstruction. Corinth was a case for the application of common sense in accordance with the age, and the apostle met it very wisely. But the Corinthians can't apply to us, to Americans living in New York. Our men are not—so bad as that! If St. Paul's restrictions had a present application, what would become of the Sunday-schools and day-schools, for the women teachers, whether married or single, would have to ask husbands at home. Instruction would have to be imparted universally by men."

Mrs. Bowne laughed, and Mrs. Ashton, staring over her glasses at Mrs. Catherwood, replied: "Well—I don't know about your views, but they seem—seem very latitudinarian. I knew you were a Presbyterian! and then our 'Law and Usage' says, Section 811, that the Scriptures 'do prohibit the fulfilling by women of the office of public preachers at the regular assemblies of the church.' I thought you were a Presbyterian, you know, and might be afraid, because of your husband's position, that we were asking you to countenance something not orthodox. If a woman spoke in prayer-meeting, it would be about the same as preaching in a regular assembly."

"I have never joined any church," said Susanna, in troubled thoughtfulness; "but I am a Christian, and I think, if the spirit moved me, I shouldn't hesitate to speak in either a regular or irregular Christian assembly."

"It is exactly the way I feel," said Mrs. Bowne, "although I never shall speak in meeting, for I have no talent of that sort. A great many women come to our meetings who never open their mouths; but that is not the case with Mrs. Ashton, I can assure you. She is our chief reliance when we want to carry a cause. We call her our tongue of fire. On the other hand, we have some members who seem to talk just to hear their own voices, and then there are others whom we all want to hear as often as we can. But, whatever we do, there isn't anything in any of it to offend the most conservative."

"Are these particular meetings to be something like those the Methodists carry on?" inquired Susanna.

"I never was at a Methodist meeting of any kind," replied Mrs. Ashton, with some hauteur, beginning to suspect Mrs. Catherwood of trifling with her dignity.

"I think," said Mrs. Bowne, in a soothing tone, "you had better come to-morrow and see for yourself. Mrs. John Upton, whose husband was minister to Austria recently, is going to tell us what Christian women are doing in Vienna."

"Is she!" exclaimed Susanna, enthusiastically. "I have wanted to hear her for a long time."

Mrs. Ashton regarded Mrs. Catherwood severely. "I hope you do not approve of her notion of opening our male colleges to women?"

"I have only lately been thinking of the subject, Mrs. Ashton," she replied, with a disarming brightness and cordiality. "It was such a tremendous step in advance when Vassar was opened, and now there are Wellesley, Smith, and others; and the question in England, too, you know, is a growing one. Colleges for women alone have so interested me that I have passed by the newer issue till very recently. I did not know that Mrs. Upton was interested in the higher education of women. She would carry a great influence."

"She is interested in everything under the sun and moon. She boards!" replied Mrs. Ashton, her bonnet strings trembling, her stiff brocaded silk rattling as she moved uneasily in her chair. "Home and church and society are a female's sphere. Mrs. Upton has begun to lecture on temperance—in public! and she quoted Mrs. Cady Stanton at one of our meetings. There were a number who felt quite shocked."

"But, Mrs. Ashton," interrupted Mrs. Bowne, "there were others there who admire Mrs. Stanton, and I think"—she had a candid, motherly, round face—"I think we women are in more danger of being too narrow than too liberal, and I am glad of the chance to hear what women have to say about women, whether I agree with them or not."

"So am I," said Susanna, her voice thrilling, and then, with something propitiating and disarming in her manner, she continued, turning to Mrs. Ashton: "I have seemed to disagree with you continually this morning, but I am sure you will find me, on further acquaintance, deeply in sympathy with you on many subjects. A woman's influence in home and church and society is of course paramount, although these are large terms. I feel very grateful to you both," she added, "for extending an opportunity of which I shall certainly avail myself."

There was a running talk now on general subjects, Susanna exerting herself to be agreeable to Mrs. Ashton. The old lady thought her beautiful, but with a grand manner not usual in a minister's wife and with an astonishingly untrammelled way of expressing herself withal.

As the committee drove away, Mrs. Ashton said, as if apologizing to herself for Mrs. Catherwood, "She's

young; she will learn wisdom." Then, but as if the thought were too absurd, she added, "Haven't I heard something about Dr. Catherwood's wife being woman's rights?"

"Oh, I don't think she has gone as far as that," said Mrs. Bowne. "I should feel very sorry to think that, for Dr. Catherwood's sake. It is the higher education you are thinking about."

"Well, perhaps it is, but that is bad enough. I think female colleges preposterous. I am glad to get her interested in our meetings, anyway. We haven't a single woman from the Calvin Memorial. Isn't she beautiful! I couldn't take my eyes off her, although there was a moment, while she was talking about the Corinthians with the assurance of a minister, when I felt as if I should get up and walk right out of the house. It sounded blasphemous."

"That is a fine house for a minister to live in, isn't it?" said Mrs. Bowne, reflectively.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Ashton, with regret; "and we lost a good chance. I have heard so much about the annex, and we might have seen it, just as well as not, if we had asked. I don't suppose half the stories one hears are true, but it must be wonderful! When Dr. Catherwood married Miss Kildare, there were plenty of people to say he would resign from the ministry in a couple of years and live on her money — but he has certainly held his own. I never leave my own church under any circumstances, and so I have never heard him, but they say the Calvin Memorial is packed morning and night, every single Sunday, and it must be himself, for he is an old story by this time. Do you think," she went on, "ministers ought to marry outside their own denomination?"

"I don't think anything about it, one way or the other," replied Mrs. Bowne, cheerfully. "But, at all events, whether I did or not, I couldn't blame a Catholic priest for marrying a woman like Mrs. Catherwood, if he had a chance. Did you notice her voice? We must get her to lead in prayer some day. It is so persuasive that if she prayed in Russian it would awaken feeling."

"We don't want too much feeling," said Mrs. Ashton, augmentatively. "We want thinking and acting."

"You can freeze a meeting out with thinking. There must be feeling before there is acting. Well, here we are at my house," as the coupé drew up to the pavement. "It was very kind in you, Mrs. Ashton, to stop for me. Don't worry about Mrs. Catherwood. You will find she is all right. Good by," and Mrs. Bowne, squeezing her immense proportions out of the door with some difficulty, nodded and began to pull herself slowly up the high stoop leading to her front door.

When her callers had left, Susanna walked up and down the drawing-room in much agitation of spirit. Mrs. Ashton had made her feel smothered with sex.

To see a dignified old lady trammelled like a child about the right or propriety of relating the experience of sixty years, except to a company of women, and never from the pulpit, where divinity students might bore a congregation with crudities, or the sons of Mrs. Ashton, bone of her bone, flesh of her flesh, might stand and dictate to their mother—to her who had moulded their character, and stamped her mind upon them—what it was right or proper for her to do,—to see this and hear that such an order of things was by the sanction of God—and women believed it! It was dreadful! Men might, some would as long as they dared, but for women to believe it! and then she smiled, her step grew more composed. Logically, Mrs. Ashton was right about the higher education. Mrs. Bowne, with her generous sympathies, was drifting on a tide by which she would sail into a larger kingdom before she was aware, and the higher education was the first swell of that current which would carry women into the open sea.

She thought of herself as still outside the pale of the visible communion of any church, and most of all, her husband's, with a wistful longing to believe the elaborately formulated doctrine of the Calvin Memorial, if only for his sake. Formerly, he had gently urged that if she could accept the doctrine, the organization should not hinder her from the usefulness which would accrue to both him and her if she were a member—the doctrine embodying infallible truth, the organization no vital principle.

Lately, he had not dwelt upon the need of membership as he had when they were first married, and the relief

from such pressure was welcome. She had a covert belief that the reason was because the woman question was growing upon him more and more as one of the tremendous problems of the near future, and he was forced to stand still until he saw the issues more clearly. She comforted herself with the idea that, at least, he knew she had gone as far as the honesty of her nature would permit in identifying herself with the social organizations, the charities, the Sunday services, and weekly meetings of the church to which he had given his vitality and his very soul.

And now, suddenly, she smiled again, as she thought of the Young People's Christian Endeavor Societies and the Women's Christian Association and the Women's Missionary Society, in one of which the young women spoke in meeting before the men without a compunction of inconsistency to the interpretation of Scripture by their church, while in the others, Presbyterian women were such a power for good in prayer, exhortation, and addresses delivered before both men and women. And these useful women, the strongest of whom were flames of spiritual light, would, according to the polity of the Calvin Memorial, offend God if they let that light shine from a wooden box called a pulpit or in an audience room called a church.

But why should she stand out against technicalities, obsolescent beliefs, even if still involved in the letter of Presbyterian law? Why? Because, seeing the dawn, she might be one of those through whom offences lingered. Why? Because she could not do otherwise. By her convictions, acquired and inherited, she was commanded to belong to the minority, to that little band of intellectual, political, moral, and spiritual pioneers, who march in the van, always misunderstood, but forever beckoning the huge, inert, complacent majority forward. "The glorious minority!" she said aloud to herself. Rather, she must do what she could to emphasize the feeling intensifying in all the churches for a more elastic organization and a basis of unity readily comprehended by believers and non-believers. Creeds had to be simplified, individual interpretation of Scripture must be conceded, the gospels made of first importance, and the epistles classified with the great writings of godly men of

all generations, as the work of those who, being still in the flesh, saw as through a glass darkly.

She was more literal than her husband in purely intellectual processes, and her deductions, consequently, more logical, her generalizations more exhaustive. On the other hand, his imaginative processes were larger and truer than hers; he possessed that leniency of the oratorical temperament which loves to persuade rather than compel. If his executive powers and extended experience had not fostered a certain conservatism and if, from environment, as well as temperament, he had not been a student, he would, long ago, have been swept away by sentiment. But thus far, notwithstanding discouragements, his civic, charitable, and church efforts had tended towards successful culminations.

His enthusiasms were still youthful, his trust in humanity still ardent, his generous impulses still moved him to the largest endeavor and to sanguine expectation. Nevertheless, he had begun to have reactions. He had come close to the dividing-line between youth and middle age — to the line which separates impulse, with its fiery energy, from deliberation, with its hand forever on the pulse advising caution.

For the first time, he began to question his moral and intellectual forces, and to realize with the tremendous disappointment which at first paralyzes the humanitarian, that the arm of one man, however virile, is but a puny thing, the influence of one personality, however potent, inadequate for much else than suggestion. He stirred his church, he thrilled the community, but the evil against which he had been pushing, pushing! till his very nerve threatened to give way, was like a mighty boulder so pivotally firm on the edge of a precipice that the wind might rock it, but never overturn it. His eloquence, his influence, — they had been but an idle wind, rocking the stony bulkiness of public sentiment!

To add to his mental unrest, he had recently begun to rearrange some of his dogmatic beliefs. His wife and he had traversed many fields together, and lately they had become conscious of an expansion, she calling it a modification of view, he denominating it a nearer, clearer vision of the truth. They had been summing up data, the result of archæological, ethnological, sociological,

literary, and Scriptural study, and they were suddenly astonished at the goal whither this comparative reading and examination had led them. Out of it all, the Christ had emerged luminous, like the summer sun out of a morning fog; but they felt awed, dazzled, and as if under the spell of a supernatural vision which they would find it impossible to interpret to others.

And Catherwood, feeling his way to his duty in the pulpit, not quite sure lest he might not react, not armed, as in the past, with the youthful confidence still investing his wife like a coat of mail, and, with the propensity of the student to delve farther, to see farther, maintained a public silence compatible with honesty, but disquieting to heart and conscience. He began to bend under the burden of life, — a burden so exquisitely fitted to its triple pressure on mind, body, and soul, consuming without annihilating, that one moment he was tempted to cry out against the cruelty of the wisdom adjusting it with such precision, and the next to fall on his knees with a reverent faith. He believed himself led by the Spirit, but whither? He could not tell, and a hundred times a day he called out, like a child lost in the darkness, "Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom!"

It was in this frame of mind, in this humiliation of spirit, that he went to see Hillerton.

CHAPTER II

THE elder's office was on the third floor of a building still without an elevator. The minister began to run up the stairs, two at a time, but stopped to rest at the top of the first flight, a constricted sensation taking all the life out of him. He looked pale and worn on opening the door. There were watery bags under his eyes.

Hillerton noticed the throb in the extended hand, and his face, seldom affectionate, lighted with brotherly solicitude as he led the way into his inner room.

They sat down opposite each other, the elder in a revolving armchair, which threw into bold relief his fine physique and ruddy, handsome face. Catherwood's ecclesiastical appearance had increased with years, but the subtle blending of the gentleman and scholar as well as the man of affairs was mingled in it, making him a conspicuous figure wherever he went.

The affinity binding the two men together through much difference of opinion and ambition, held them closely, and there was a large confidence in their mutual regard.

Catherwood felt the impassiveness of his friend in direct proportion to his own tension. He roused himself with an effort, Hillerton noticing it with a silent wonder at his virility, for the elder had a keen scent for the first signs among men of nervous wear and tear; but when Catherwood drew out "Law and Usage," Hillerton's face hardened.

"I am making calls on a score of our members, Hillerton," — the minister smiled genially, the lines about his chin and nose deepening. He looked old. "My purpose is to direct attention to obligations still a living force in country communities, but more and more set aside in the city. My church, our church, has a grave duty in this matter."

"For instance."

Catherwood chilled under his tone, but began talking at length on the evils of the tenement system, directly expressing condemnation of the houses of four of the Calvin Memorialists. He attacked the saloons as a source of rental to several members, and read aloud from "Law and Usage" a recent declaration of the General Assembly, that "total abstinence from all intoxicating drinks as a beverage is demanded from every Christian by the condition of society, the purity of the church, and the Word of God." He named three of his members who sold liquors at wholesale or were living on fortunes derived from their sale. He mentioned six others whose buildings at various times had been raided by the police as houses of ill-repute.

"What do you propose to do about it?" asked Hillerton, tilting back in his chair.

"I propose, as a preliminary, to preach a sermon on principles which seem to have become a dead letter in the Calvin Memorial. I shall then allow an interval of time, to afford some of our prominent members an opportunity to institute a reform. If they do not, I shall call a meeting of the session."

"Your sermon will only stir up ill-feeling. If you push the matter, the men you name are likely to walk out of the church, and then where would the annual income be? If you should call a meeting of the session, the majority of the influential members would stay away; they are all accustomed to wine at dinner, and they would feel afraid of becoming involved, if you were to attack retired brewers and wholesale liquor-dealers. You quote that little black book. It has a double name — 'Law and Usage.' You propose to attack usage under the name of law."

"No, I don't," replied Catherwood, with warming energy. "I propose to revive law and change usage — or else force the issue to a new set of laws under which our church life will at least appear consistent to the outside world."

"I would advise you to do nothing of the kind," replied the elder, with equal warmth. Then, in a tone of tender expostulation: "You have worked yourself nearly to death in building up a church without its superior in the

country. Look at our membership; look at our charities; look at the men you have gathered about you; look at the aggregate wealth of the Calvin Memorial. You are taking this severe view because you are tired out. Go to Europe and recuperate; when you return, you will see differently. I will get you a three months' leave of absence."

The minister's eyes burned like coals. "I have worked hard; I am tired. But my view is neither distorted nor morbid, and I shall not take a rest, much as I need it, till I see whether there is salt enough in the religion of the Calvin Memorial for its spiritual conservation. If there is not, then I will talk of Europe."

Hillerton felt deeply irritated. He did not propose to have his business interests scrutinized, his methods questioned, his income examined into — and this in substance appeared to be Catherwood's intention. If there were rules capable of the construction the minister put upon them, they would better be wiped out — but what would that mean! He saw the succession of sessions, synods, presbyteries, the General Assembly. If he were let go, Catherwood would stir up things to such an extent that he would set the vulgar, loquacious, curious, censorious public agog, and he must be stopped.

"See here," he said, his brows meeting in a deep furrow, "do you know what you propose to do? It would be as impossible as to change the Westminster Catechism. If you do this," he continued jocularly, "I'll pin you down so that you will have to preach the annual sermon on hell and predestination and infant damnation and several other cheerful themes required by Presbyterian law, but let go as quietly as possible by usage; and I'll see to it that you preach it in your own pulpit before your own people, and with the literal awfulness of the Rev. Michael Wiggleworth." He began to walk up and down, quoting the colonial poet's picture of Christ, at the Last Judgment, reading the "Doom" of lost souls: —

" 'They wring their hands, their caitiff-hands,
and gnash their teeth for terrour;
They cry, they roar for anguish sore
and gnaw their tongues for horror;

But get away without delay,
 Christ pities not your cry:
 Depart to Hell, there may you yell,
 and roar Eternally.'

"The stanza on the natural depravity of non-elect infants is particularly neat. Listen:—

" 'A Crime it is, therefore in bliss
 you may not hope to dwell;
 But unto you I shall allow
 the easiest room in Hell.'

There's Presbyterian doctrine for you, and though I count myself fairly orthodox, I can't stand that. I received a reward of merit thirty years ago, in Sunday-school, for reciting Wigglesworth's poem without a single omission. I don't believe it; you don't; but there are, I'll wager, a hundred Calvin Memorialists who do. His sentiments have got to remain in the Confession of Faith till they and their like die. We can't—our generation can't—believe it, but all the same, we intend to stand by the Westminster Confession on general principles, and we do not expect to leave the denomination of our fathers, or be turned out of it either, because we have dropped a part of the Calvinism of the grand old founders of the church. Apply the same course to other views some of us hold. You ought to advocate a larger liberty than I do, for you are in essence a Congregationalist."

"Ah, there's the rub, Hillerton." He sprang nervously to his feet. "I begin to feel tied hand and foot in the Calvin Memorial. I tell you, the letter killeth, and what with such a body of law and usage, and such an elaborately formulated body of doctrine as I am compelled to preach, if I live up to my installation vows, what is there left of time or strength for the revelations, the inspirations, the eternal, living spirit in the living church? And how can we have a live church, if its purity, its influence with sinners, is in question? If our lives, as examples of holy living, do not stand the test when compared with the lives of those who make neither profession of faith nor conduct, what are we but an enormous social organization, carrying on a system of charities, supported in part by sinfully begotten wealth?"

"No one doubts what you are," and Hillerton laid

a cool, strong hand on his shoulder. "But you have not answered my question. Are you prepared to enforce the precepts of the Rev. Michael Wiggleworth concerning infants?" He laughed, and Catherwood smiled humorously. The tension was broken.

Then, with a serious thoughtfulness which startled the elder, the minister, looking steadfastly at him, said: "I am feeling my way, my friend, in many directions. But of one thing you may assure yourself. I shall not ask more of you and others than I would of myself. I am agitating this matter we have discussed for two reasons: first, because Presbyterian law says thus and so; secondly, because I believe Christians are responsible for the uses to which their property is put and the means by which that property is acquired. If there is any one thing I believe in as a citizen, as well as a Christian, it is tenement-house reform. If there are any two pernicious influences to which I am opposed, they are the saloon and the house of assignation. As for members who will hesitate to attend the session, because they drink wine, if they do differentiate between wines and spirits, let them say so, and let the church have a clear understanding on the subject through the General Assembly. As for retired brewers and wholesale liquor-dealers, their property, if not of shameful derivation, seems to me at least of questionable origin. Sad will be the day when the Calvin Memorial or any other church believes itself obliged to condone or flatter or welcome because of wealth. Now about the damnation of infants not among the elect. Your question is not pertinent. I am about to present a living issue to responsible individuals. You mention a class irresponsible in their short life here for whose spiritual welfare, whether the doctrine of infant election is true or not, I am not responsible. If you insist that I am bound to preach the doctrine because the Presbyterian Church says that it is found in the Bible, I will say that from Luther's time to ours the Scriptures have been an open book, thank God, from which each one may read according to his light. The opposing doctrines which various men, different denominations, find in them have become of minor interest to me, and it seems to me that their presentation from the pulpit depends altogether upon the ratio of their importance.

A minister's first duty is to save souls, and the doctrine of infant election to heaven or hell is not likely to do that. I, of course, believe in the Scriptures as an infallible rule of faith and practice; but who can be sure of himself as an infallible interpreter?"

"The Scriptures are the only infallible rule," corrected Hillerton, sharply.

Catherwood felt staggered. Never before had the full force of that word "only" struck him. His sensitive conscience took alarm. He grew pale. His eyes flashed.

The elder misunderstood his agitation.

"God helping me, no — I don't believe that! I believe," he repeated solemnly, "in the Scriptures as an infallible rule of faith and practice; but I believe, also, I do indeed believe also, in the living church, — living, acting, having faith, practising the precepts of Christ long before there was a New Testament. I believe in the living church, in which the truth has been handed down from generation to generation, sometimes by only a handful of souls, in its purity, sometimes by thousands upon thousands, as also having within itself a rule of infallible faith constantly tending to illuminate the interpretation of the infallible rule of faith in the Scriptures. The church would go on without the Scriptures, because the Spirit is in the world, as Christ was, nineteen centuries ago. The Scriptures might have been forgotten and destroyed, if the church had not existed to cherish them. And if they were destroyed, the church would still go on." He drew a long breath. "There is something you have done to-day, Hillerton, which neither of us foresaw. You have discovered me to myself. I must go home and think. I must review myself as a pastor to Presbyterians."

"See here, see here," urged the elder, not knowing whither the minister's zeal and sincerity would carry him when once set in motion about himself. "You are a good enough Presbyterian. None of us could stand the test, if the inquisitorial screws of the 'Confession of Faith' or even of 'Law and Usage' were turned on. There is a common-sense basis for these things. There has to be a confession of faith; there have to be laws. The young would go to rack and ruin without them; it does them good, too, to take them literally; something

saving is sure to stick. But all a church can ask of a mature person in these days, is whether, in the main, he has such a belief, whether, in the main, he purposes such a course of conduct. What a church wants is a bit of common ground—and we all go along with our various compunctions, we each take a little latitude here or there, but, on the whole, jog on in the right track. I should regret to see one of the men whom you have mentioned leave the Calvin Memorial. The income they yield to the church has no mean value; but they are worth keeping for themselves. They are substantial members of the community. They do no wrong with their money from their own point of view. They make investments in real estate; the investments must yield an income. They cannot dictate as to the uses of real estate, any more than a silk manufacturer can about the sale of his goods to moral persons only for moral costumes. The minister who puts the Bible into a boy's hand is not to blame if the only book the lad studies is the Song of Solomon. I let my rooms to a thief. He takes them for so much money. The rooms become his for the specified time. He is the trespasser, if he stores them with stolen treasure. Wine and beer are good in their place. The man who sells them cannot limit the demand or restrict the quantity. The purchaser is the responsible party. Apply your principles in their ultimate consequences to business, Catherwood, and trade would stop. Business is one thing; the church is another. Preach general truths to the business men in your congregation and let them make the application. Your responsibility ends when you have preached the truth as you see it; don't try to enforce it; the Inquisition tried that sort of thing and failed. Our good Presbyterian brothers will continue to make incomes on a business basis as long as the church stands; be content, if you can squeeze a goodly sum out of them for the various benevolences which you have organized and stimulated. Money is always dirty; don't ferret out its source. Transmute it into the things which stand for health, beauty, and goodness. That is your work with money, and you have had a wonderful success in the past."

The elder rose and extended his hand as if the question were settled.

Catherwood regarded him with scrutiny not unmixed with humor. "Do you suppose I am going to shake hands on such a string of fallacies? I have often heard of hard-headed Presbyterianism; you are affording me an example. Go on making money; go on heaping up riches; go on appeasing your conscience by contributions to reformatories and lying-in hospitals; but, I tell you, your conscience will not stay appeased, or the time come when these needs shall cease, until the church lives the truth it proclaims, and the sources of the muddy streams, which supply such institutions, cease. Having had my say, I am ready to shake hands."

Hillerton shook his hand warmly, amused and irritated at once. Again, an involuntary look of regard passed between the men. In spite of themselves, they influenced each other.

As soon as he was alone, Hillerton rubbed his head in great perplexity. He sat down. He got up and walked. He stared out of the window over the bay. He took his ledger and examined his accounts. He thought Catherwood a fool, but a sublime one.

"It's his wife!" he suddenly exclaimed, and her picture rose before him. "She urges him on. She takes these radical views because, like a woman, she knows nothing about the pull, the strain of life down here. He is so imbued with her, that he is bound to think as she does. They will drag each other to ruin before they get through."

He began putting on his coat, the thought of Susanna continuing to pursue him. The very sight of her face still had power to stir him profoundly. His thwarted selfism led him to oppose her at every turn, and then to hate himself for doing it. He felt angry whenever she talked with him in a grand, impersonal way about charities, music, the church. If she would only manifest the slightest reminiscent sentiment! He measured his loss by her happiness, and the perception of both kept growing. If he could have thought her less of a power instead of more, as the years passed, he might have become reconciled to her refusal of him. If he could have believed her weak or fickle or not quite satisfied as Catherwood's wife, his egotism might have been appeased. But he had to see her often, in order to enjoy her husband, and

the contact sometimes maddened him beyond reason. He protested by instinct against such a many-sided woman, and by instinct and perceptions whose force he would not admit he was compelled to admire her more than any other woman living.

"We are all fools," he said, locking up his desk. "Catherwood is one kind, I am another, — but we are all fools — fools and blind. I wish I had never known her, never seen her, never had to feel that there could be such a woman."

CHAPTER III ·

WHEN her husband reached home, Susanna perceived, more vividly than in the morning, the note of depression in his voice, and she forbore asking questions.

They dined alone now, for Mrs. Dutton was too feeble to come down-stairs.

As the minister walked arm in arm with his wife to the table, through the spacious, quiet rooms, their elegance and dignity soothed his tired nerves. There was a scent of roses in the drawing-room. Although it was still daylight, the curtains of the library were down. The gas was lighted and turned low. A lamp under a red shade cast a soft light on the books and papers. Here was one spot in the world, he reflected, where there was as little jar as perhaps could possibly exist in a man's life. He ought to do double duty for the world. He had no right to be discouraged.

His step lost its nervous quickness. Susanna arrested his glance of grateful love, and, happy with the peculiar tenderness a woman feels in ministering, she pressed his hand, nestling her head into his shoulder a second, and sat down to dinner with that pride of reciprocated affection, the spell of which can make a man or woman defy the universe.

She told him about a reception she had attended, giving him the minutiae of social gossip with the vividness only a woman can put into such details. She drew a picture of a certain Mrs. Bole just starting on a career as the wife of a possible future diplomat.

Catherwood laughed as he saw Mrs. Bole's vast proportions sailing down the long New York parlor, her shoulders set, her lynx eyes glancing from under half-dropped lids, dexterously ignoring some and expanding with flashes of delighted recognition whenever she passed a woman whose husband might be useful.

It seemed to him that nothing escaped his wife's perception of the ludicrous.

When the fruit and coffee were served and they were at length alone, he went to her and, drawing her head back, held her beautiful face pressed between his hands, looking long and tenderly into the depths of her lovely eyes.

"As soon as I come home to you, I feel like another man, these days."

Turning her head and kissing his hand, she sent him back to his coffee.

After dinner, leading the way into the hall, she took down his coat, holding it invitingly out for him to put on.

"Oh, I am too tired to make calls to-night."

"It isn't a call. It is we two and no more."

He was sufficiently rested to feel passive and acquiescent, and, putting on the coat, he helped her with her own wraps.

The evening was a mild one of early April. The sky was brilliantly but softly blue. A great star, limpid yet sparkling, hung in the west. A faint red glow still lingering above the hills across the Hudson sent a shimmer of warmth up the horizon. There was a delicious, pervasive smell of country freshness in the air—the first wholesome notice of the spring from the Park not far away. Drawn up to the sidewalk was a phaeton, and Susanna, pointing to it, said: "For tired old folks like ourselves. Let's take a drive."

He loved horses, but there had seldom been a time in his life, since he was a boy, that he had had much opportunity to gratify this fondness. A few minutes later, his wife saw by the way he held the reins and the eager, attentive pleasure with which he watched the action of the spirited creatures, that she had found out the right thing to divert him, if only for a few days.

After that, they drove every evening, sometimes in the rain, sometimes with the wind whipping their faces, and often till late, when he would come home so sleepy and tired that he got night after night of rest, and thus apparently swung back to his former poise.

Meanwhile, he made his calls, preached his crucial sermon, and finally, as he had anticipated, saw himself compelled to summon the session.

Hillerton, however, had not been idle, and Catherwood met with a twofold surprise on arriving at the meeting.

On taking the chair as moderator, he perceived that every deacon and elder was present, and, also, a pervading and extreme good-will, indicating that however much these men might differ among themselves in other matters, they had assembled, now, united by a common impulse. Before long, through some indefinable, telepathic transference of thought, he knew that they were united against him, and a discomfiture, impossible to resist, stole over him.

The usual routine of business having been completed, he called for the question of the evening. To his surprise, there was no response. He waited and waited. Finally, one of the very men on whom he had most relied to open the argument, surprised him by making a motion to adjourn. It was immediately seconded.

Catherwood said that he believed there were certain important matters pertaining to church government to be considered. "Will some one speak?" he requested.

But nobody took the floor.

Perceiving how simply he had been frustrated, he allowed the motion to be carried, and closing the session, as was his custom, with prayer, and having pronounced the benediction, he asked all to remain, as he had something on his own part to say unofficially, since their action had rendered it necessary, and it was expedient and proper that he should address them in a body.

He caught Hillerton's glance, at once friendly and triumphant. He realized that everybody else there felt equally friendly and triumphant. He grew pale. His glowing eyes seemed to retreat under his overhanging brows. His clenched hand trembled on the table. There was a moment of profound stillness. The clock against the wall ticked with the loud clearness of the silent room.

He broke the hush by leaving his chair and walking forward into the midst of the men seated in a semicircle. Visibly struggling for emotional self-control, his arms folded upon his breast, he began talking. At first, his voice was husky with feeling, but gradually it cleared. He told them of his prayers, his hopes, for the Calvin Memorial; of his discouragement of late, over the

worldly attitude of his people towards wealth, towards church revenue, towards principles which, whether right or wrong, stood implied or avowed in the statutes of Presbyterianism. He said that he would concede the question of morals altogether for the present, in order to make his issue stronger on church law. At this avowal, several shifted their position, appearing to feel less neutral. But, forgetting himself, he quoted St. Paul on sin as violation of law, if sin for no other reason, and perceived that he at once lost the slight hold he had gained. He appealed to the opinion rapidly gaining ground in all denominations, that there was one rule of Christian living for city churches and another rule for country churches. He declared his aim to be to agitate the question of a less burdensome body of rules on which membership should be conditioned, or else a consideration of those rules with a view to their literal support by the Calvin Memorial. He admitted his powerlessness according to the law to take a single step forward, unless there was a person or persons to sustain the charges. He spoke appreciatively and feelingly of the works of the church — how they were praised wherever the Calvin Memorial was known; but, he said, he wanted to hear the church equally praised for its pursuit of the higher life. Finally, he made an impassioned entreaty for the official aid of the session to back him in the crusade he intended to organize in print and in the entire Presbyterian church against the three matters which he had presented to the session individually. He sat down.

Another period of profound silence followed, broken, at length, by the oldest member of the Board rising slowly and gravely. He was a venerable man, with blue eyes and snowy hair; his countenance was full of caution, benignancy, and shrewdness.

"What I am about to say, I say as one man to another behind closed doors and with the understanding that it shall have no official force. I take courage to speak, because the points you have presented do not touch either my past or present, but I speak from a wide experience, aware of the difficulties of a business life, the foibles, yes, the follies to which we are all prone, and a perception of the fact that Presbyterianism is an ecclesiastical corporation with no power to enforce laws to which pun-

ishment of legal significance can be attached. It accordingly behooves us to consider whether those whose habits you propose to rebuke will feel rebuked, if the church should act against them, and whether their withdrawal from us would not be a loss to the Calvin Memorial from which it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to recover. I, for one, think the public would regard those who in some respects are an offence to you as more sinned against than sinning — doing the best they can, on the whole, according to their light, the community in which they live, and the restrictions of whatever environment they were reared in. Presbyterianism is a vast body, having the weight of a venerable authority; its laws and usages have not been the growth of one day or one year. Strong as our church is locally, advantageously placed as it is in the metropolis, it is but a fragment of the greater church. The constitution of a church, like that of a country, must be accepted as a whole; it is arranged to suit the needs of many sections, of many minds. After it is once a living force, to try to cut out here or add there, is a hazardous process often fraught with evil consequences. I see no harm in the fact that country churches interpret more literally, as a rule, than city churches. They make their own interpretation; we make ours. They are more persistent church-goers, for instance, because the church is to them not only a means of grace, but it is the main source from which they obtain diversion. They chiefly watch and pray from necessity; we work for the same reason. Their deeds and our prayers are complementary. So it is all along the line. No one can surpass me, Mr. Catherwood, in the respect and admiration I feel for you, or in the confidence I have in your ability and intentions, but I am compelled to say that, for the first time since you came among us, I find myself unable to agree with you. You are still comparatively young; I am old and conservative."

Mr. Moulton sat down.

Hillerton now rose, and the look flashing between him and the minister was one of mutual pain.

"You ask impossible things of us, and I appeal to you as one friend to another, and with the same reservations advanced by our venerable brother. I am prepared, and so are the elders and other members accused as I am,

prepared to rent property otherwise, as soon as you devise a method, and prove its validity, by which we can make five per cent on the money invested."

"That's fair," exclaimed a number.

One of the deacons rose.

"I have been accused of renting a house for a place of ill-repute. I do not rent it for that purpose, although I am aware that it is used for such a purpose. The use to which my house is put is the responsibility of the lessee. But neither the tenant nor the landlord is the guilty party; neither their disreputable occupants nor the police, both of whom are occasionally raided for political purposes, are the chief aggressors. When you attack the landlord, the tenant, the occupants, or the police, you simply call attention to a foul, dirty stream running, for the most part, unnoticed and unknown by the pure and virtuous. The aggressors to whom you should appeal and whom the law will never dare attack, so widespread is the evil and so valuable is the voting power, are the thousands of men in this city and from all over the country whose vileness creates the tenant, the occupants, and the supervision of the police. I am no more responsible for the use to which a house I rent is put than a church is for the use to which an old building it sells at auction is put."

Mr. Stiles sat down.

Mr. Steinberg rose. He looked blandly around. He smiled conciliatingly on the minister.

"I stand accused of living on a fortune obtained from the wholesale liquor business. I admit the impeachment. It does not disturb my conscience. In the first place, I believe in the moderate use of wines, beers, yes, spirits. I cannot therefore object to their sale. What does Timothy say, Mr. Catherwood?"

Several countenances relaxed.

"I established a business in this country under great difficulties," he continued. "Prejudice was much stronger against these things twenty-five years ago, and I had an uphill road. But New York has become cosmopolitan. We are in closer touch with France and Germany than we used to be. A large percentage of our people is from Europe. We are returning to the ways of our English, Saxon, and Latin forefathers. I see no

harm in it. Well, how did I get my first start? By making a specialty of communion wine. Then I had a sprinkling of orders from wealthy Christians who could afford to have wine cellars. This helped greatly as an advertisement, and, thank the Lord, I went right ahead after that. In recognition of the fact, I have given one-tenth of my income to the church ever since joining it, twelve years ago. I feel at home in the Calvin Memorial, although, certainly, I am not willing to remain in it otherwise than as a member in good and regular standing. I can walk out of it, if the brethren tell me to. I don't want to, but there are plenty of other churches to welcome me and make a wise use of my money."

He sat down, but sprang to his feet again.

"I must add, Mr. Catherwood, that I feel towards you exactly as our venerable brother does. I have agreed always with you in the past. I only think now that, while you are much in earnest, you are much mistaken."

Several nodded emphatic approval as he sat down a second time.

Others spoke in much the same strain.

The minister resisted, pleaded, and put his strongest powers of persuasion to the task; but at the end of two hours he desisted, white, haggard, and with that inane and humiliating sense of failure, so heavy for a man to bear when he stands alone and opposed to those whose verdict in most matters he respects and values.

All were conciliatory and flattering towards him in the extreme. He became aware that they were afraid he would resign, and again a sense of humiliation stole over him with the perception that, after all, his resignation meant absolutely nothing compared with the disaffection of twenty moneyed men standing well with the community at large. As little as this did it mean to be a religious leader at the close of the nineteenth century in a land founded upon religious conviction. The meeting broke up with assurances of support in almost any direction he might choose to ask for it. But he went out from the session a changed man. His youth had fled. He became, in a strange, new sense, a man of sorrows.

His wife met him at the door when he returned at midnight, and his weary, serious face told its own story. They did not talk much between themselves of the opposi-

tion of the official board. It meant more to both of them than the surface of their conversation would indicate. The crisis which she had anticipated when he accepted the call to the Calvin Memorial had arrived. This was clearer to her than to him. She believed it would turn out his great opportunity, if his volition and energy remained unimpaired under the ordeal. She only wondered that his enthusiasm, simplicity of character, and singleness of aim had obscured certain conditions and situations as long as they had. Her entire sympathy was with him. She saw, however, that the logic of the situation was on the side of the Board. She believed her husband was right, but the attitude of the Board inevitable. It might, indeed, almost appear that Catherwood had forced an issue. She did not shrink in her thought from her own responsibility in the matter. She knew that oftener than not in the past she had been a guide along the path he was following; that he had been too intent to exhaust every situation and opportunity to see very far ahead. But she knew, also, the clearness and grasp of his final vision, and that sooner or later the time would come when he would look off to the distant horizon and behold the light which illuminated the future.

The spring advanced very fast, and his cares and the warm, languid days told on his vitality with renewed effect. His sermons were written more laboriously and conscientiously, if such a thing were possible. They grew more fearless and radical. He was taking upon himself the responsibility of the inertness of his elders and deacons.

The story of the session got abroad and became the theme of endless discussion. Presently the church began to divide into factions, and Catherwood was first made aware of it in its social aspect.

Usually, in the spring, his engagements permitted of a little more leisure with his family. Susanna and he did more reading together at this time of year. But now the books had to be completely laid aside, for a succession of dinners was tendered them by their adherents, which, ordinarily, they would not have accepted with such punctilious uniformity.

The point of view of husband and wife on church affairs, at this juncture, was more diverse than it had

ever been before. Catherwood simply felt repulsed; Susanna knew that he had been conquered.

He seized every opportunity to increase his influence, to get ready for another attack in the autumn, — and still another if need be, till he won.

She kept all their flags flying, with a curious mixture of pride, triumph, and defiance, fearful lest he should break before he was ready to evacuate, and happy that neither place nor power had made him less true to his convictions. With a candor of appreciation which was her rare virtue, she realized that however much her influence counted for, it was of small value compared with the courage required of him. In the bliss of its profoundest experiences their love had known mutual revelations akin to those in the ascending series of circles in Dante's "Paradise." Susanna now entered into that heaven which is a woman's consummation of joy after years of married life: she was able to look up to her husband as her hero. His battles became hers, his cause hers, in a nearer, tenderer sense than ever before. Tired as he was, he thrilled under the new, fond light in her eyes, the deeper caress of her tone, the more lingering touch of her hand.

Meanwhile, having become a member of the Ladies' Christian Union, she entered into touch with women in a stimulating and charming way. After a month of listening, she found herself on her feet one morning, speaking, out of a full heart, her longings for some warm, fine sweetness of spiritual experience. How often in church, when sitting under the spell of another's eloquence, she had felt like a spring bubbling up against a stony barrier, but choked back for want of an outlet! Now, a naïve wonder and delight possessed her over the discovery that she had something to say in a religious meeting that touched some, helped others, and made them want to hear her again. It was as if she had discovered a sixth sense. She half rose in the weekly prayer-meeting of the Calvin Memorial one night, and then sank back with a thrill of indignant remembrance that there, though she spoke "with the tongues of men and of angels," her testimony would be unwelcome and conducive to schism. Only the thought that her husband's burdens were varied enough without a feather's weight through her, kept her

still, and it was with burning cheeks and a sense of moral asphyxiation that she bowed her head while Mr. Steinberg poured forth a cyclopædia of information in the way of a prayer, as if God were even out of reach of the telegraph.

But to all appearance, the difference of opinion between the minister and his official board had increased his value to them; for, on the first of May, his salary was raised. He handed the letter informing him of the fact to his wife. "What do you make of that?" he inquired.

"That you are a valuable pastor, if pugnacious; but that you won't be so pugnacious in the future."

"I won't take it. I can't afford to feel trammelled."

So Catherwood refused the increase, and the Board looked at one another, fearful lest they had not heard the last word yet from him. Money was money. A business man never had enough of it, even though it took away his power to say his soul was his own. Here was one man reserving that prerogative to himself, and presently he would assume again the right to dictate rules of conduct to them. Before they separated, several grew quite interested in hearing Steinberg's account of a Scotchman who preached straight Calvinism and drank his glass of whiskey and water with a national appreciation of its merit.

"Well, we don't want him," said Hillerton. "We want Catherwood. If we are as satisfied with ourselves as we have represented to him, I, for one, am pleased that he is not cut after our pattern. I don't think as he does—exactly, but I believe in him, I believe in him without a reservation."

CHAPTER IV

SUSANNA's success in building had been as varied as her experiments. Her experience had neither depressed nor elated her; some of her views had of necessity undergone modification, one aspect of tenement reform assuming more and more tangible proportions. She became convinced that she had only partially solved the problem of housing the poor, since her investments thus far had, one year with another, yielded but two per cent. Until they did better than this, she was in no position to make an appeal to people who looked at the business chances only of such enterprises. She perceived that the house she had put up several years ago was too small to utilize space to the best advantage, and as Hillerton refused either to build on the corner or sell, she was blocked in that direction, while, on the other side of her property, the land was held under a questionable title and was therefore undesirable for investment.

At intervals she drew new designs, but always now with a view to a coöperative movement, and for buildings covering considerable areas.

Catherwood and she had the intention to make an early effort to organize a committee to consider methods for the formation of a building company; and then, church affairs pressing upon them, they held the matter over till another season.

Meanwhile, she was already ranked by architects as a promising member of their profession, and took no slight satisfaction in the fact that her studies had resulted in a half-dozen country churches for whose designs she had entered into competition.

She had also drawn the plans for her own home, supervising its building, and convincing her husband that his work would take on breadth and opportunity, provided

he lived where he was readily accessible to every class and where he could better economize strength and time.

His settlement on the East side, while not growing rapidly, was a thrifty plant, and, as soon as he had efficient helpers of his own training, he gradually transferred much of the responsibility to them, frequenting the settlement sufficiently, however, to keep his hand on the lever and thus maintain his notion of the spiritual aspect of the work.

Perhaps nothing either wife or husband singly or combined had done excited more comment than their residence and its annexes. This group of buildings stood in a fine neighborhood and was constructed on such a generous scale that it compelled attention. It covered six city lots, was situated on a corner, and commanded two streets and an avenue. On the exterior, it resembled an elegant dwelling, palatial in size, yet with an air of such sober dignity and chasteness of design that it soon received the name of the manse palace. Its ample roof sheltered the materialization of three ideas, one of which was a home, the second, a school, and the third, a hospital.

Susanna's first energy was directed towards the home, which lacked nothing in appointment that her wealth made justifiable. Spaciousness, beauty, and dignity were its predominant characteristics. It occupied the entire frontage on one street, and, with not much more than half the ordinary depth of a city residence, its rooms were so windowy and airy, the window draperies so light and adjustable, that the cheerful effect delighted everybody. It represented one of the first experiments towards a New York mansion not suggestive on the outside of tombs nor on the inside of a vault.

Admittance to the school was by a door, let in through a wall on the avenue, leading to a court laid out like those of Italian palaces. The hospital faced on the side street, opposite the home, and divided the space equally with the school.

When the group of buildings was completed and appointed, the Catherwoods gave a reception to their church people, their aim being always to keep this relation distinctively uppermost.

They had, moreover, decided that in a profession where their usefulness would be measured by their willingness

to be all things to all men, they must create an atmosphere of accessibility in a very near and true sense for whomsoever came within the sphere of their influence. Their home, accordingly, was so appointed as to appeal to all classes.

It satisfied the pride and loyalty of the Calvin Memorialists, and, as Mrs. Catherwood had her day, she maintained, to a certain degree, a social prestige about which they were tenacious. She was open to lunch and dinner invitations to a moderate extent. Her name was associated with two or three charities, a social-eleemosynary feature of the city life rapidly assuming substantial importance.

The men of the church entered into far more intimate relations with their pastor when sitting over his library fire, than they formerly had, in the Gothic study with its lancet windows and lofty ceiling under which the shadows seemed to be forever lurking.

People of a class not accessible to ordinary church influences, and rarely met with in the usual round of charities, were willing to seek advice of the minister and his wife when they found the Catherwoods ready to receive them informally, to answer letters of a private nature as privately, never thrusting between themselves and sore hearts secretaries or printed forms containing a series of questions. They exerted no inquisitorial power, but, keeping their sympathies open and genuine through personal contact with suffering and need, they usually obtained through voluntary confidence whatever information they required.

The subtle differentiation of their aid from anything savoring of condescension, inquisitiveness, or suspicion achieved wonderful results, the minister holding that it was once in a while better to make a profound mistake than repel natures whose misfortunes were the measure of invalidism, environment, talent, or character. No class interested him so much as this one — the easiest to drive into silence or obscurity, often the most ungrateful, but the class, after all, making the finest, highest test of the disinterestedness of those extending assistance, and the one fullest of that sublime struggle for existence surcharging city life with examples of harrowing pathos and exalted courage.

He had many talks with his wife before they could decide upon the particular aspects which the school and hospital should assume; but, finally, both questions cleared, the solution was reached by the process by exclusion.

Their experience convinced them of the comparative ease with which extreme conditions can be met. They realized that there were public schools, charity schools, private schools; but where was there a school whose one aim was to shelter and foster talent? And if they formed such a school, how were they to secure the students? What kind of talent should they encourage? Where should they place the limit? What conditions should they impose?

It was at this juncture that Susanna insisted on one essential as basic, growing out of her conviction of the value of her own education. The school should be for girls, because their opportunities, all else being equal, were less than the opportunities of boys. Entrance examinations, equivalent to a college entrance examination, should be required, because statistics showed that less than one per cent of the girls of New York pursued a college education. The school would thus be an incentive to the higher education, and any girl, whatever her talent, would, after such rigid preliminary preparation, be better fitted for special work. If necessary, girls should be helped to obtain the preliminaries elsewhere; for the school must keep its reputation intact by preserving its entrance standard.

"The expense is going to be far heavier," interrupted Catherwood, his caution aroused.

"In the beginning, yes, but in the end, no. There are just as many rich girls with talent as poor, possibly more. They would flood the school before we knew it, but would be taken out on the slightest pretext. Thus our school might easily fall into disrepute and our purpose be defeated. If attendance became a distinction and a mark of superior attainment as well as ability, the rich would make a corresponding exertion, preparatory schools for girls with the same standard as those for boys would gradually come into plentiful existence, and, in time, after we have passed away, and when the higher education for girls has become an historical fact

of as vast moment as the New Learning proved to be for our English ancestors, our school might serve as the foundation of a Harrow or an Eton for the daughters of American women. We must, however, limit the number. Let us take the limit of the French Academy—say forty.”

Catherwood laughed. “That will do to begin with. Now, how are we to get the girls?”

“There must be competitive examinations, the papers to be anonymously presented to competent judges—specialists, principals of schools, professors.”

He nodded. “You do not intend to put Mrs. Carleton on the examining committee because she is amiable, or Mrs. Knowles because she is popular, or Mrs. Monies because she might endow a chair.”

“No, no—certainly not,” she added emphatically, for her thought had turned in another direction. “I was thinking of the kinds of talent we should encourage. I think the school should make its own appeal. We must make it practical and immediately useful. It should add to the occupations possible for women. Not many, for instance, can be writers of a high order of literary excellence. But many could make superior journalists, editors, or reviewers. Fancy what it would be to have a hand in the development of a De Quincey, a Scherer, or a Sainte-Beuve. There must therefore be a department of literature. There should be one for applied art. Women could just as well as not decorate interiors, design furniture, tapestries, wall papers, and kindred things. There might be a law department. I could deliver an occasional lecture before it. More and more women ought to study law. More and more are becoming property-holders. Crime grows more complex with an increasing civilization. The ordinary woman as well as the ordinary man should know how to protect property, prevent crime, improve society through legal procedure. The talent for detail, for research, for deduction, evident even in some uneducated women, ought to have an outlet. How admirably such women might do the office work in association with others having skill as pleaders. One woman lawyer in a community would be to all the other women, by her mere knowledge and presence, a *cave canem*. There should be a department for girls de-

sirous of becoming trained nurses. This might prove highly desirable in connection with the hospital."

"Well," said Catherwood, "to train yearly ten journalists, ten designers, ten lawyers, ten nurses would be a great work."

Her cheeks flushed, her fingers closed about his in a quick, eager clasp.

"How happy the thought of it all makes me; and how my life has broadened, dear, since you and I started forth together. I should never have done as much without you as with you. I do not believe any one, however resolute, is a sufficient incentive to himself for continued exertion in outside directions, do you?"

"I can hardly think that," he replied thoughtfully. "There have been a good many examples in history of men who have died for an idea—yes, and of women, too; but I fancy they were very self-centred. You and I are living less to perpetuate our own ideas than help others make the most of the ideas to which they were born; and, this being the case, my chief wonder is how we got on as well as we did and as long as we did, without each other. Between us both, we usually get the near and the far-sighted view of most questions. But we have not talked over the hospital sufficiently. I should like to see it limited to the homeless rich and the homeless poor who are gentlemen and gentlewomen. No hospital with the very best equipment is equal to the ordinary home under medical or surgical supervision, these in their turn supervised by vigilant love. But hospitals have their place, for the homeless or the unloved are legion. There is another thing about the hospital I should like to insist on. As long as we live or have the means to carry it on, let us keep it out of the hands of a corporation. Otherwise, we cannot thoroughly test the merit of our plan, or limit its usefulness with the same precision. I have always thought the sick were man's greatest opportunity for self-sacrifice. Most people seem to select the sick as especially in need of discipline or repression. God forgive the neutral sympathy, the cautious admission of their need, the polite withdrawal, the selfish spur put upon strength failing under the most heroic efforts of will. I suppose we shall make mistakes. Everybody does, with the very best intentions.

But if we could take care of just a few, darling, who would likely otherwise be overlooked, take care of them in a way to send them out from us well — as well as the lame, the halt, and the blind Christ healed with no other burden to bear than 'See thou tell no man!'

"I think, as the years go on, with the large opportunities we have to do good in various ways, we are likely to grow complacent, perfunctory, mechanical! God save us from these weaknesses, so chilling, so repulsive to the very ones whom we would desire to serve.

"There will have to be charges for the hospital, but they can be on an elastic scale, with an endless time limit, and we must invent methods to invite the assistance of those bruised spirits who would feel in debt, do what we might, if they thought that the only weight besetting them, after leaving us, was one of thankfulness. For there are a few people in the world who are too thankful, their very gratitude hindering their future usefulness; but they are rare spirits, easily discernible, and we are not likely to make mistakes with them."

In time the mechanism of both school and hospital were much as the Catherwoods had originally devised them, and at the period when the minister's difficulties with his deacons and elders arose, each was in fine working order, the school having sent out its first fully fledged forty, while every room in the hospital was in demand.

The school had been an annual loss, on the basis of the sum Susanna yearly set aside for it, but it had been a wonderfully quickening influence, and she felt repaid. It made the higher education for women more talked of, more thought of; it provided refined employment for a number of girls closely related to some of the wealthiest and most influential families in the city; it withdrew a small number, at least, from the overburdened vocation of teaching; it dignified work for women; it altogether changed the views of an appreciable number concerning the creative and inventive capacity of women; it initiated two clubs on a modest, tentative scale, but clubs much talked of and visited by the friends and connections of their members.

The club for the discussion of current events met a need long felt among girls, affording them opportunity to gain a wider knowledge of political and scientific

subjects than they were likely to obtain by solitary reading; it immediately became self-supporting, flourishing, even fashionable. The other, the business woman's club, seemed burdened with its name, its applicants, and its lack of any other than a material basis. It died, finally, of its own inanity, as there were not enough business women sufficiently representative to give it a decided character, and its fees were of necessity so small that the meagre sitting-room, scanty outfit of writing materials, and lukewarm furnace heat made its headquarters a travesty on its name. The idea of such a club nevertheless remained.

Sometimes the Catherwoods felt they were living under a great strain. Now and then Susanna's heart cried out for more time with her children. Occasionally, the dismay of a selfish disappointment swept over her when her husband was called away while they were in the midst of some heart-to-heart talk. But there was an inspiration about the successful swing and impetus of their life, they continually came into such near contact with so many phases and types of humanity, their thought was so freshly and wonderfully directed through their ministrations to a perpetually enlarging conception of the Fatherhood of God, that their vision seemed mercifully closed, as far as they themselves were concerned, to the possibility of those mishaps or obstacles suddenly and apparently disastrously diverting or terminating particular currents of human usefulness.

Susanna's first intimation of such a contingency was a nearer and, for the time, more poignant one than her husband's. Her fear was for him. Her womanly solicitude and tenderness flew to its chief centre, and, for a while, she seemed to lose her power to feel or think for any one but him. But as he reacted, met the vexations and disappointing results of his appeals to the session with silent dignity and not even a latent grudge against his opponents, she took a new view of his vitality and generosity of nature. A larger appreciation of his personality animated her courage, and, while foreseeing the final result of the mischievous, factional spirit fomenting day by day, as well as of their own crystallizing convictions, she threw herself with renewed vigor into the duties of the hour.

But her husband had been hurt in a larger sense than either comprehended. His illusions had fled never to return. Hitherto, duty had only needed the gentle spur of a ready enthusiasm. Hereafter, it was to be a war-horse controlled by a bit that cut until the blood flowed.

He began to review his life, to experience the mingled pleasure and pain of reminiscence, to sift with an inquisitorial spirit motive from action, to reach absolute values with the personal factor left out. His humility increased; all along the road of his successes, he saw that not seldom, whatever his theorizing to the contrary, he had done good with the stimulus of the reward prominently in mind. He knew it now to his shame; knew that the reward had animated him to sleepless nights, to weary days, to apparent and continuous self-sacrifice. He saw himself—and the picture dismayed him. He fled from himself, and, for a time, his sight was blinded so that he could not behold that larger Man, that only One, call Him by whatever name human pride or honest doubt may invent, that only One, who, being in all respects like other men, was yet without sin.

Disappointment over the present frustration of his ideals for the Calvin Memorial, perplexity as to his future course, but chiefly that solitude of the soul so awful to a man who has known the ineffable consolation of Divine Association, invested him with a strange, new presence and gave his manner an inexplicable mixture of unapproachableness, childlikeness, and dignity.

In their secret souls, his official board became afraid of him. Elders and deacons gave money right and left, looking to him for a smile of gratified recognition as boys to a father when they feel they have made an heroic sacrifice, in reality ludicrously small. He responded with the smile they asked for, but their minister, their pastor, kept looming up behind the kindly recognition with some strange reticence in his indulgence that set them thinking, and at inopportune moments, full of the hard, grim, bitter, selfish fight of business life, made them feel ill at ease with themselves.

And so May came, a cold, backward May, with untimely frosts in the latter part of April.

Susanna hastened preparations for an earlier return than usual to the orchard cottage, and Celinda was sent

ahead with other servants to get it in readiness, Catherwood having expressed a desire to take the rest he had promised his wife in the only spot where he could be at once at home, free from intrusion, and with ample opportunity to roam or drive or study, as inclination might suggest.

But however busy or harassed Mrs. Catherwood had been of late, there was a part of every afternoon which she kept sacred to her grandmother.

Mrs. Dutton was in that gentle and gradual decline so imperceptible from day to day, but with an inevitableness in its meaning of which she appeared supremely unconscious.

Her granddaughter had known for several months that the slender flame of life was a flickering thing liable to mingle with the darkness at any moment. But the tenuous light had burned on through the inclement spring, and now it would seem that the approaching summer might still hold a measure of vigor and comfort for the dim eyes, the feeble hands, and the little shrivelled body.

The old lady's slow and halting step was a familiar sound in the hospital, whither Susanna conducted her two or three times a week. At these times her granddaughter carried a basket of flowers which Mrs. Dutton distributed with her own hand to patient after patient. Sometimes she stood beside a bed and prayed, and the tremulous voice, the brief, simple petition from one on the brink of death for a young life returning to health, had an element of pathos hard to bear. But, chiefly, she was anxious to hear how it all happened, and she would stroke a white, thin hand lying lax on the counterpane, rock a little back and forth, wipe her eyes, and murmur, "Poor dear, poor dear, how you have suffered!"

The doctors and nurses said at first that it was all very bad for the patients; but, in some way, her ancient mother heart brought consolation to the motherless or the stranger, and finally the fact became patent that the invalids were better rather than worse for the old lady's calls.

She had frequent lapses of memory, but the transitions from the present to the past and back again were like an infant's dreaming and waking. All was sooth-

ingly vague. Reminiscences had ceased. Brief realities pursued one another like the shadows of summer clouds on the mountains.

Care, struggle, bereavement, seemed to have lost permanence in her memory, and an immortality of relationship and love to have become the one abiding reality of her long and checkered life.

Susanna responded oftener these days to her mother's name than her own, and Catherwood was the husband laid at rest half a century ago. The children were little ones whose eyes had closed in sleep among the Connecticut hills, and Susanna knew for the first time endearing ways and speeches of aunts and uncles who antedated her mother in their birth.

On the afternoon before their departure for the farm, and after watching her children take their early supper and tucking them tenderly in bed, Mrs. Catherwood went for her other child, as she fondly called her grandmother in the depths of her heart, in order to make a final visit to the patients.

As they walked arm in arm down the long, light passage connecting their own house with the hospital, they lingered by a window overlooking the court. The sun was still a half-hour high, and its light mottled the grass already vividly green; a thin breeze fluttered the fronds of palms set out for the first time that day. The urns and borders were gay with pansies, jonquils, and daffodils.

"It is very beautiful, dear, but Italy isn't home. Don't you think we can sail before long? I would rather see the old farm than the finest castle in Europe. Let's go home."

"Yes, grandmamma, soon."

They walked on.

By and by they entered the room of a little girl.

"How does my Janey feel this day?" Mrs. Dutton stroked the sunny curls. The child looked up with a wondering, half-frightened stare, but when she saw the gentle, wistful, faded eyes, smiled.

"Janey's better," said the old lady, glancing at Susanna in pleased relief. Then, laying a bunch of pinks in the thin, white fingers, she tottered away.

The next patient was a woman of thirty. Her eyes were shining and dark. There was a touch of color on

her cheeks and lips like the fervid heart of a rose, but the very lustrousness of her beauty, the transparency of her skin, the pathetic hollows in cheeks and temples awoke some feeling more vivid than usual in Mrs. Dutton.

"O Maggie, Maggie," she exclaimed appealingly.

"Yes, I'm Maggie," replied the invalid, with a glad smile. "How did you know my name?"

"Oh, I knew, I knew!" and she shook her head plaintively. "Would I not know my own child? You have been gone such a long, long time, dear! I have been so lonesome without you!" She sank by the bedside and laid her wrinkled face on the outstretched hand. "Oh, it is so good to touch you again — just to touch you! I have put out my arms in the dark, I have prayed to you, Maggie, to come back — but you never came before!"

The tears were streaming down Susanna's face, something in the patient's features and expression awaking her own memories with poignant vividness. She feared for the invalid, but her anxiety was allayed as she saw the glad, rested smile hovering tenderly and wistfully about Mrs. Arrowsmith's mouth.

"It is so long — mother! since any one called me Maggie, called me her child." She raised the aged countenance between her hands.

"Can you stay, darling, stay with your poor old mother? Oh, I've been so lonesome for you!"

The invalid regarded her with a strange radiance of expectation, meanwhile caressing the soft, wrinkled cheeks. "I shall be here, mother, as long as you are. You and I are here now for just a day at a time."

"Yes, yes, Maggie, a day at a time. I'll go make you a cup of tea." She touched the youthful, stricken face with timid eagerness, rose, lingered with fond wistfulness, and then, taking the hand Susanna extended, tottered away, a look of housewifely solicitude animating her features.

When they again reached the window overlooking the court, and she saw the palms and flowers and paved walks and drive once more, the eagerness and fondness faded like a dream, the haunting, pathetic, homesick expression so characteristic of the aged returned, and speaking in a thin, anxious voice, she inquired: "When can we sail, Susanna? I'm so tired! I want to go home."

CHAPTER V

To the Catherwoods, the orchard cottage, standing in the midst of scenes linked with so many sacred and auspicious events in Susanna's life, meant home in a nearer, tenderer sense than the city house.

The building and landscape-gardening had changed the aspect of the immediate environment. Some of the apple trees had been cut down, and ornamental shrubs and trees set out. Terraces covered with a thick, fine turf descended to the white turnpike, along which on either side extended a strip of well-kept lawn, in startling contrast to the near tumultuousness of the creek, still overhung in spots by witch-hazel and spicewood, and dominated by the huckleberry knoll. The young pines, in whose tops Susanna had rocked with the freedom and gayety of a sailor in the rigging of his ship, had grown to lofty trees.

The rickety, weather-worn barn under the ledge had been replaced by a modern stable of native stone and wood, so much in harmony with its surroundings that its gables seemed like outcroppings of the craggy, slaty soil. The garden had taken on a Dutch aspect delightful to Caty Ann. A low, thick stone wall, over which trailed vines and ivies of many varieties, securely shut it in and set it apart. Borders of box edged the paths intersecting it. Phlox and day lilies, roses and stock-gilly, but-tercups and johnny-jump-ups, embroidered the rims of military squares, within which hobnobbed all sorts of vegetables.

The path, much wider, but still the same old path down which Mr. Brereton had walked with his great-granddaughters, led to the creek, although the irregular steps had been replaced by broad, shallow ones, with the original stones fitted in here and there, the larger ones cut with quaint inscriptions to recall their former use.

A rustic summer-house stood on the edge of the huckleberry knoll, and under Susanna's favorite pine; here her children were taught to see with her eyes, hear with her ears, to love the names of those who, silent, yet spoke, and to learn the histories of men and women, whose existence, whose joys, whose attainments, whose disappointments, were the elementary condition through which they lived, and were largely to feel and act as members of society.

The old gray house at the angle of the two roads remained a landmark, but a commentary, as well, on time and change. A few repairs had been made, but it represented a constant interrogation in Mrs. Catherwood's thought. A sentiment for the past had kept Mrs. Dutton from renting it when she first went away, and gradually its very isolation and emptiness seemed to possess a sacredness not to be lightly dealt with.

So this time, as always, when the family returned along the familiar road, noting each detail of field and hill, of woods and mountains, it was the old homestead that was the first to signal them from afar.

Mrs. Dutton had sat apathetic and drowsy until she heard it mentioned. Then she leaned out of the carriage, the wind catching a wisp of her white hair and waving it back and forth like an answering signal to the scene of her strenuous prime. There was a gleam in her wide-expanded eye, a light like that of youth. Susanna put her arm tenderly about the aged form, trembling with eagerness, and whispered, "Almost home, dearest."

"Is that Maggie at the window?" She leaned farther out, glancing back at her granddaughter with a childlike hope of assurance. But, as they drew nearer, and she perceived that the old house was closed and silent, she wiped a tear away.

The drive led under the locusts at the rear of the former home, and thus by an easy ascent approached the new house. Celinda, whose crinkled hair had turned white, was a distinguished-looking personage with her robust figure, her snowy apron and linen collar, as she stood on the wide porch to receive the travellers.

Mrs. Dutton took the faithful hand guarding her on one side as she alighted, and after gazing steadfastly at Celinda, leaned on the colored woman's arm with a kind

of hugging confidence, as she tottered into the house, as if here at least were a warm, human reality.

Catherwood lifted the children out, and they ran screaming with delight under the apple trees, diving at the dandelions thickly sprinkled over the grass.

The air had the spicy freshness of a spring sunset among the mountains. Long golden rays crept over the lawn. The apple buds were already pink. The tall lilacs, brushing the old house not far away, glistened with a faint purple lustre. The voice of the creek had in it the peace and soothing of the sea; the mountains, tipped with light, soared like crowned monarchs in the north.

Susanna took her husband's hand and they lingered, after the others had gone in, to enjoy the sweetness and consolation of it all.

"This is chiefly what is worth while,—this nest under the shelter of the everlasting hills, with you and the children in it for comfort and joy." He drew a deep, contented sigh. "The rest seems like a dream, a troubled dream, now that I am here. I must go back to it shortly; I shall want to, doubtless; but here, I get at the true meaning of it. Here, it doesn't seem worth a single sleepless night, a single harassing day."

"Everything on God's earth will come right in time; it must. Let us forget we ever had a care off there." She waved New York magnificently out of existence.

He laughed at the scope of her gesture, then he caught the deep, unspeakable devotion in her lovely eyes and kissed her.

"Mamma, mamma! we has gingerb'ed for supper, and 'tittle birdies is all a-sizzlin' in the titchen—and we'se doin' to tate supper with you. I'se so hung'y!" Their wee girl came stumbling through the grass, while their boy, leaning over the piazza rail and catching at an apple bough, vaulted into space, swinging high above his depth, but holding on with a lusty grip speaking well for his future.

Catherwood picked Janey up and carried her picka-back, with a look at his wife which made her child a double joy.

And thus the sweet night closed in about the old farm, and once more, beneath that starry canopy, clearer and

more heavenly than softer skies beside the sea, the aged and the young renewed their strength.

The uneventful days glided away, one after another.

With her little daughter snuggled to her breast, Susanna loved to sit rocking on the wide porch overlooking the creek, her heart a sea of love without introspect, retrospect, or thought of the future.

After the first sleepy, apathetic reaction had passed, Catherwood began to take long walks in every direction. Sometimes he and his wife drove along the shaly foothills, through tiny valleys high up in the mountains, over wood-roads under the shadow of the primeval forest, the silvery moss crunching under their wheels, the squirrels peering at them with bright, keen eyes, the birds chattering notes of warning over their invasion.

And as she kept her little girl beside her with a certain gladness and energy of appropriation, as if the winter had deprived them too much of each other, he loved to wander over the old farm with his son, teaching Brereton the names of things, pointing out the beauty of the awakening earth, initiating the boy into that love of nature which makes solitude a sacred communion, and forests and streams and flowers a source of silent rhapsody. He pointed out the hickory buds looking like tips of gold in the sunlight; he lingered beside a venerable silver maple, showing how the rugged, corrugated bark indicated its age, and the mossy branches, gleaming white here and there, suggested the birch. He contrasted the red maple blossoms, feathery and shifting in the light breeze, with the lacy intricate network of twigs on other trees still bare and wintry under the warming skies. He felt the finely woven texture of the birch-bark, saying it gave him a haunted feeling as of Christabel; and there in the shady wood-lot through which he and his wife had wandered on the first, sweet, glad day in which they were one, he recited the mystical, weird poem, and Brereton, young as he was, appropriated to himself for all time the lilt of the rhyme.

Thus ten days passed, and Catherwood began to rouse from the oblivion of this elysium and to forecast the hour when his fortnight should end. To both him and Susanna the summer carried a more continuous separation than usual; for she was to remain at the cottage

with the children till October, and he could see his duty in no other light than to spend all, or nearly all, of his Sabbaths in the city.

Summer leaped into existence this year. The transformation was wonderful. The forests were bare and sere one day; the next, they were covered with a blush like the crimson of dawn; in a week, nature had furnished them with a vast umbrella of greenness.

Mrs. Dutton sat from morning till night on the porch, or wandered slowly under the trees, or stole through the rooms of her former home, whose doors were never locked. Often her granddaughter would find her seated there in a high rocker, formerly her favorite chair, a mystical, far-away gleam in her sunken eyes, as if they saw visions in those deserted rooms for which language failed her.

One day, Caty Ann came to make a visit; seeing the front door of the old house ajar, she stole softly in.

Years were just beginning to tell upon her placid nature and enduring blondness. Her step was not quite so firm, her cheeks not quite so pink; but her thin muslin gown, with its sprig of lilac, revealed trim and round proportions, and her amiable blue eyes were as alert as ever.

The gray house had gathered a reputation for witchery and mystery in the neighborhood, as the years passed, and it was not without a gruesome expectation of something unwonted that she tiptoed inside. The attic door was open, and the perpetual wind of the region sighed through the crack and moaned down the wide chimney.

A look of awe and apprehension suffused her countenance, but she went on into the bedrooms.

The windows were up; the air was redolent with the perfume of roses in full bloom. But the rooms wore the lonesome, orderly aspect of chambers from which their accustomed occupants have forever departed.

She stood still in the middle of the floor and wiped her eyes — why, she could not have told, for the ripple of laughter from a child's throat, as musical as the note of a meadow-lark, came from afar on the breeze.

"Dear, dear! I could think it wus S'anna herself. I'm glad her leetle gal features her in her laugh. But she'll never ekil her mother, Janey won't."

At this moment, feeling a touch on her arm, she sprang aside with a scream, expecting, as far as she could analyze her fear, to see old Mr. Brereton. But, instead, she beheld Mrs. Dutton peering at her anxiously.

"Wasn't Maggie calling me? She was poorly last night and it kept me up. I've been napping in the attic. Where's Maggie?" She looked around, surprised. "She hasn't tried to go down-stairs, has she? It worries her so to see me doing all the work. But I'm strong—I don't mind, if she will only eat."

Again the ripple of laughter floated in.

An indulgent smile lighted her wrinkled face. "It does my heart good to hear Susanna laugh. She couldn't laugh like that and not be healthy." Then, regarding Caty Ann with an odd, puzzled furtiveness, she inquired, "Who are you?"

"Why, I'm Mis' Van Voorhies. I've come to spend de day wid you. An' your workin' days is all done, Mis' Dutton, t'ank God. Don't you remember who I be?—Caty Ann Van Voorhies"—she screamed, in some way confusing the aged woman's feebleness with deafness.

"Oh, yes—Caty Ann—yes! How do you do? We're going to have a picked-up dinner to-day, but you're welcome. Take off your hat."

She untied her bonnet strings. "It's de welcome I've come fer, Mis' Dutton, an' I've often noticed det picked-up meals is de best kind. But laws, don't worry 'bout dinner. I'll turn in an' help. Hes S'anna ben a-havin' trouble wid her hired help? Ef she hes, I ken turn in an' help, jes' es well es not. You've always got C'lindy to fall back on. She's de only nigger I ever c'd bear. I feel like tryin' to scrub ev'ry one I ever see. C'lindy's haar meks her look raal human, an' she's got brains, C'lindy hes. What's S'anna's help ben a-makin' a fuss 'bout?"

Mrs. Dutton clasped and unclasped her hands, looked around, and returned dreamily to the present.

"I like to come over here."

"Ain't it a leetle damp fer you? It feels chilly like to me."

She shook her head. "I want to show you something," she said eagerly, beginning to lead the way to the attic, Caty Ann following with delighted expectation.

The old lady laboriously climbed the creaking stairs, bracing one hand against the side as she did so, her visitor supporting the other arm.

Under the rafters, pushed as far as it would go, was a bureau, one drawer of which was partially open.

"It's full of Maggie's things," she whispered mysteriously.

Caty Ann drew a couple of chairs forward. At last her great opportunity had come to view some of the Dutton belongings of that far-away time, when they lived in New England.

What she beheld was simple enough, but there was a daintiness about the needlework; there were pieces of lace, a few fine handkerchiefs, underwear of a texture and make such as she had never seen. Finally, Mrs. Dutton opened the bottom drawer, and took out a gown of lavender India crape.

"Wasn't she little, when she was married? Mr. Kildare could clasp his two hands about her like that," closing her thumbs and forefingers together, admiringly.

"You don't say so! She did hev a leetle waist, sure 'nough. Wus dem her slippers?"

"Here's her cape," drawing forth a long cloak of fine cloth, silk-lined. "It's a cloak for a lifetime. We couldn't get it in this country. We had to send across for it."

Caty Ann felt the texture critically. "What'd you pay fer it? It's a cloak to hand down. I should t'ink S'anna'd git a lot of wear out of it, yet. Hain't she never used it down in York?"

Mrs. Dutton looked at her reproachfully. "They are Maggie's things!"

At this juncture a step sounded on the stairs. Celinda's head appeared.

"O Mis' Dutton! T'ank de Lawd. We've ben a-lookin' everywhar fer you. Mis' Catherwood, she's follerin' de creek. What made you t'ink of comin' up here?" questioning her mistress, but regarding Caty Ann quizzically, as the possible author of this disappearance.

Mrs. Dutton rose with a childish flurry, but stooped and pushed the drawer shut.

"Hain't you ever found her over in de ole house before?" inquired Caty Ann, defensively.

"She's in an' out a dozen times a day; but she don't never go up and down stairs no more. It's jes' dose rooms she wanders about in whar so much happened."

"Woll, 'twan't my fault! I see de front door open, an' walked in, an' fust I knowed, Mis' Dutton wus a-standin' 'longside o' me. She brought me up here to look at Maggie's t'ings."

"Now, honey, yo' put yore dear arms 'roun' my neck, an' let me carry yo' down." Celinda walked away under her burden, with an affectionate proprietorship, Caty Ann feeling under condemnation in spite of herself. But she followed after, sure of sympathy from Susanna, and with a purpose not to be thwarted in her visit.

The next morning, the bureau was brought down-stairs, and, almost daily, through the summer, the old lady took out the precious garments, fondled them, talked to them, and admired them, till they became a kind of fetish, replacing her longing for her daughter.

Meanwhile, Catherwood, with brief vacations of two or three days at a time, spent at the cottage, pursued his work in the city. He was one of the examining committee of candidates for the school; he was often in the hospital, praying with the dying, cheering the convalescent, winning the confidence of the discouraged and friendless. He threw himself with fresh ardor into tenement reform, sending numerous articles to the daily papers on the subject; sometimes a column appeared embodying a statistical review of efforts made abroad. The methods of Lord Shaftesbury and Mr. Chadwick were explained. The industrial dwellings of Sir Sydney Waterlow were described. He showed the growth and prosperity of the Artisans, Laborers, and General Dwellings Company, laying stress on the immense property it had already accumulated. He lauded George Peabody and Sir Edward Cecil as philanthropists, whose work was as sacred as that of the foreign missionary, emphasizing the fact that thousands of workmen in London were living in comfort, while corresponding thousands in New York were declining under conditions of bad sewage and foul air. He set aside, for the time being, the religious aspects of the question, treating it wholly from a municipal and sociological point of view. He took occasion to

thank Hillerton for the idea that the model tenement to incite the interest of the public must show a five per cent increment, and henceforth he made it his primary object to study plans and statistics guaranteeing an annual five per cent dividend.

Late in the summer, a few men came together in the manse library, and a society was formed to put up some model houses on First Avenue, with the avowed object of earning an annual dividend of five per cent. Catherwood telegraphed the fact to his wife, and she flashed back a request for shares.

As the season progressed, the pews of the Calvin Memorial were thrown open to the public, and men and women never seen within its doors through the winter filled every corner.

Most of the members were in the mountains or at the seaside, and Catherwood saw his opportunity and embraced it with a prophetic feeling that it might never again occur under precisely such conditions.

As he would look down from his high pulpit on the motley throng before him, at those faces uplifted to him, as if from him or nowhere must come help to bear the burdens of that hard and bitter and exasperating poverty, grinding out hope and health and liberty of soul and speech, he prayed agonizingly in spirit for more light. The church, for the time being, became to him the people's church, and the people did not cry out for ease in Zion; they did not know or care whether what they heard was sound doctrine; but they knew from themselves what love meant; they knew how human love worth the name would die for its beloved, would work for its helpless and stricken till the hard knuckles bled, till the aching heart broke, till the strained body fainted under the burden, and still find love a joy and inspiration.

And the minister, with hollow eyes and gaunt, pale cheeks, said to himself: "I must tell them of greater love even than this, but yet tender and true and partial with the abnegation of the sweetest human love—and how shall I do it? O God, how shall I make it plain to the people? How shall I tell them of the God-man? How shall I express His infinite capacity for suffering? suffering for them? as man may suffer, does suffer to the full extent of his being, however sensitively endowed, and

yet, more, more, till the love suffering for them passes the human limit and merges into the divine."

Such love was not to be expressed; it could only be believed in, because of the greatness and unselfishness of the best human love—promised as a fact, tested as a reality.

It remained, after all, for each soul to find out for itself the truth or falsity of such a promise. It could only be extended in all its alluring sweetness, vouchsafed solemnly by such a man as he who stood in the pulpit of the Calvin Memorial on those torrid July and August Sabbaths, and whose presence, armed with a grand sincerity and sweetness, spoke volumes for an inspiration superhuman.

But Catherwood could detail the needs of every soul for such a love, and this he did. He laid bare the many kinds of sorrow hidden by endurance, resignation, submission, despair, disappointment, pride.

He had not frequented the haunts of sin and folly, of squalor and drunkenness, of sin and bereavement, in vain. He could tell the story, from eyesight, of the army of little ones dying for want of light and food. He could picture the agony of the woman starving in a city full of bread and meat. He could portray the bitterness of a father tramping all day for work and finding none. He could tell of hopes frustrated, of ambition baffled, of pride found out, of sin vaunting itself in the garments of righteousness, and he did it—declaring over and over that there was but one panacea for the aggressor or the sufferer,—the love of God, the love of man. Law could not heal, morality could not banish sin, ethics could not warm to self-denial,—love, and love alone, and love seeking not its own, was the great redemptive solvent of the woes of humanity.

Thus he preached Sunday after Sunday, and here and there a Calvin Memorialist, lingering in the city, was blinded by a new light, and on the journey to Damascus found himself transported to a heavenly highway. Others, again, detained in town over Sunday, thrilled under the fervent preaching, but hoped their minister would add to his other good works by starting in the autumn a mission annex, where, no doubt, these dusty, dirty pilgrims on the road to God would feel more at home, and, incidentally,

stop vitiating the atmosphere and disturbing the tone of a church where feeling was regarded as unseemly, dangerous, and tending to superstition. Two or three members constituted themselves a committee of perpetual investigation, and by October became deeply aroused by what they called the minister's defection from sound Presbyterianism, iterating that it was not so much what he said as what he left out.

But the minister also was investigating his beliefs. Step by step he was exploring anew the "Westminster Confession," "Law and Usage," summarizing his present theories, revising his attitude towards the Scriptures, deciding whether he was sound in the faith, and under what head the most captious would classify his faith.

During this period of self-examination, the sense of solitude was of great assistance to him. His perplexities cleared; his hesitation faded; a minister was bound to a higher law than that of creed or denomination; the light shining in upon him day by day, the true light lighting every man that cometh into the world — this was his guide, this must be his chief source of strength.

During the past two years, he and his wife had gradually been reaching certain convictions concerning the Old Testament.

They had learned to seek ideas rather than facts in some of the books. They delved for the method underlying this or that book. They picked out the portions showing marks of compilation. They studied other portions anew in the light of the most recent investigations in Egypt, Chaldea, and Assyria. They tried to make arrangements of the books for their own use in the order of spiritual importance. They reread certain sections, the truth of whose historical or chronological illustrations appeared of minor importance, provided these illustrations were apt for the illumination of great principles. Their faith increased, their enthusiasm warmed as they saw themselves being lifted over and above the supposed need harassing so many Christians of fashioning belief and conduct in accordance with particular illustrations instead of in accordance with the spiritual truth which the illustrations emphasized.

The literary character of the Bible began to impress them as it never could do so long as they had made a

fetish of the Scriptures as something before which judgment, knowledge, and conviction must be abased. Its comprehension continually enlarged as they judged it in relation not to modern times so much as in relation to the times from which it sprang historically. They fell into the scholarly habit of classification, speaking less of books by their names, but oftener of them as brief treatises on law; as compendiums of sections of Jewish or world history; as historical sermons, the term "sermon" aiding them to keep in mind the chief object for which some parts were written. They had interesting discussions on how far, centuries hence, sermons by great lights of the nineteenth-century church might come to be recognized as books to be perpetuated, because of the internal evidence of holiness and inspiration.

They read aloud the Song of Solomon as an Eastern erotic poem, indicative of the simple, sensuous view with which the relation of the sexes was regarded at the time when it was written, but, even in that remote period, dignified by disinterestedness, faithfulness, and a love not to be tempted or sullied by ambition or wealth.

Job and Ecclesiastes, as summaries of the scope and limitation of human affection, as epitomes of human greatness moving on the largest scale in the times when they were composed, were an ever-recurring delight, confirming in them a sturdiness of belief that sin has received its stamp from all time, and is not to be lightly set aside as simply indicative of uncompleted evolution.

They loved to trace the clearer and clearer illumination of the Old Testament writers, as the centuries followed one another, and to link with this the promises of Christ that after He was gone greater works than His should be done. They came to believe that in the heart of every Christian might shine a light to illuminate problems new to his generation and century.

They read the Gospels reverently as history, searching between the lines the footprints of still earlier writings from which these were, at least in part, compiled. They made a comparative study of books contemporary with the Acts of the Apostles, tracing, as they had never done before, the new code — the law of sacrifice — with a new interpretation.

Through this persistent research, the historical Christ,

His message as presented by His historical followers, wrought profounder faith and worshipful love in the minister and his wife, as the new law of love and brotherhood, to simpler people in a more primitive time, commended itself and enforced itself by the working of miracles.

They bought every life of Paul that the book market contained, and studied his personality in the lines of its breadth and narrowness; they analyzed his arguments by strict logical processes, and the point at which his prophecy failed as proved by the sequence of events. They separated in his writings, as they had in those of the Old Testament, history from illustration. They made due allowance for personality, prejudice, — whatever limitation a close scrutiny of the text and contemporary authors revealed, sifting out the spiritual truth as confirmed by the wonderful generalizations of the Christ. In Paul, as well, they found the blessed marks of a superior spiritual illumination, on which they could lean with what they called an intelligent faith, mindful at the same time of the paradox of such a statement.

The enlarging perception of God as a guide through all the centuries, a present help to each age in time of need, a source of special light for the time in which a man lived, the changing circumstances of nationality or civilization, filled them with the gladness of a new conception of the Fatherhood immanent in every period of human history.

But in proportion as the Bible grew upon them tremendously, the church also grew, the living church of the living God, given more spiritual form by Christ, the Son of God, for all nations and all times.

The names of the sects came to mean to them the principal point of view of infinitesimally small divisions of humanity concerning sections of Christ's teachings. But the church, the whole body of Christians, — that term included in its comprehension whoever recognized the Father as revealed by Him who had brought a light into the world which had revolutionized the history and purpose of humanity. They beheld Christ in the Scriptures, in the church, however gross its faults, in the world history of nineteen centuries, as the way, the truth, the life, for the salvation of the world.

Step by step over this ground which Susanna and he had trodden together, Catherwood retraced his prayerful way during the hot summer nights while the patients in the hospital slept or tossed exhausted with thought or pain on their weary beds, while the school was vacant and the house lacked the cheer of his wife's presence and the voices of his children.

September found him a freer man.

His poise returned. His health improved. During the second fortnight with his family, he entered into the country life with a fervor and gayety Susanna had never seen him manifest.

He felt like one of God's teachers in a larger sense; he would teach that which was given to him to impart as soon as it became manifest. In his heart he still hugged the hope that his people and he were inseparable. His sentiment was bound up in the Calvin Memorial. He loved the rugged characteristics of its people; he still expected to overcome the Laodicean element.

The bitterest cup of all remained for him to drain, but as yet he was unconscious of it.

For the first time in his life, inclination and the subtle interchange of obstinacy, will, ambition, and affection blinded him. The Calvin Memorial suited him as a centre from which to let his energy and philanthropies radiate. He had the unfaltering purpose of a leader among men. He was willing to tack, to retreat, to keep silent, only to make a greater advance the next time he moved. The official board had the complacency of present triumph; but he would be the eventual victor. Right was on his side; the growing sentiment of humanity was on his side. He could, at least with persistency, force the utterance of the General Assembly. And, above all, the men of the Calvin Memorial were, in intention, honest men; they might parley with their consciences for a time, but, eventually, they would, they must, see with his eyes, feel animated by his purpose.

With that large wisdom so few women possess, Susanna kept silent. She could not hasten times or seasons with a man of her husband's type. She knew the sincerity of his character, the stern uprightness of his speech and thought. She realized that every quality of mind and temperament had come into play to involve him in the

contradictions of his present position, and that for the first time in their life together, his motives, his conduct, lacked the transparency which had made him such an overpowering force with those who temporized.

Hillerton had startled him into a realization of where he stood, but he had finally succeeded in blinding himself to the full consequences of his position.

His wife perceived what, a year ago, she could not have foreseen: that, after finding fault with the church for its easy-going Christianity and illogical interpretation of "Law and Usage," he intended to allow himself the same broad margin with the "Westminster Confession" by omissions of doctrine already conspicuous in his sermons.

The slippery ground on which he halted must soon become apparent to a man of his rectitude, but before he wrestled with and conquered the great temptation of his life, she feared his orthodoxy would be impugned, and, by an irresistible sequence, the honesty of his occupancy of the pulpit of the Calvin Memorial for the promulgation of anti-Presbyterian doctrine. But, knowing that by whatever means the knowledge of his inconsistency came to him, the parting from his church would be, for a time, like the cutting off of his right hand, she recognized an element of extreme pathos in the respite from anxiety which he was enjoying.

CHAPTER VI

"Is dere anyt'ing more I can do, ma'am?"

Celinda bent hoveringly towards Mrs. Dutton, who, having taken tea at five o'clock as was her wont, had retired immediately after. She looked like an exquisite piece of carved Chinese ivory, as she lay propped against her square pillows, the ruffled and lace edges of which made a kind of extra border for her dear old face framed in its nightcap.

She held out her tremulous hand, Celinda taking it in one of her own large, well-padded palms, and softly stroking it.

Some impulse of affectionateness went out from both, for the colored woman, stooping suddenly forward, kissed her mistress and friend.

"I'll just lie here and think. When a body gets very feeble, Celinda, her thoughts are like the shuttle of my old loom — they keep weaving back and forth, back and forth."

"Yaas'm; I s'pose dat's true," she replied with oracular sympathy. "Yo're sure you don't want not'ing else?"

She shook her head.

"I'll go put Janey to bed, den. I promised her I would, to-night, if you could spare me. And den I'll hurry and eat a bite, and git back to you befo' it turns raal dark." Looking over her shoulder with mingled love and solicitude, she went out.

The sun had just set, and the first soft approach of the September evening was upon everything.

Mrs. Dutton's room was on the first floor, and opened on its own porch, which led down into the orchard by a short flight of steps. A sweet, old-fashioned growth of lilacs, syringas, and rose bushes made a stretch of bushy

shrubby near its windows, overlooking the steep slope of the lawn between the houses. She could lie in bed gazing on this mass of greenery, and seeing beyond it the end window of her former chamber.

The afterglow lingered in the west, touching a shrub here and there with a spark of light and shining against the glass of that window before which in the past she had so often stood in absent-minded perplexity. The light faded. The old house loomed beckoning and lonesome. She had not entered it for a week, Mrs. Catherwood and Celinda discouraging her. An irresistible desire stole over her to wander through those deserted rooms once more, the thought of the busy life around her, with its forward-looking interests, adding to her impulse. She was part of the new house in body; but she belonged, whether she would or not, to the old.

With a cautious attentiveness, she sat up in bed and listened.

Voices in the dining-room informed her acute ears that the family were at supper.

She slipped out of bed, trembling with eagerness and fear lest her purpose should be thwarted. Celinda's rebuking solicitude seemed to embody itself as she thrust her feet into a pair of slippers and her arms into the loose sleeves of a wrapper. Her eyes fell on the night candle on the stand beside the bed, and she seized it with some new thought uppermost, putting some matches in the pocket of her gown.

As she stepped out on the porch, the coolness stole from the mountains with a keen suggestion of autumn. A light wind fluttered the leaves of the apple trees, yellowing, speckled, and already falling. There had been a drought, and the grass felt slippery under foot.

Her gown floated out like a sail as she hurried from sight around the near corner of the old home. Once there she paused, her strength momentarily failing.

The Virginia creeper, vividly red, and trailing over the stone wall which had taken the place of the worm-fence where Susanna had smoked grape vines, was the only touch of warm color in that sombre spot. The window under which Janey and her mother and Egerton Brereton had lain in the stillness of their last sleep was open. She leaned on the sill, to which her chin just reached,

peering in, as if she would repeople the ancient parlor. Then she went on, the candle held out as if it revealed her path, and tottering up the steps into the dooryard, flitted white and eery-looking along the path and disappeared inside the house.

The wind sounded hollow through the numerous cracks and crevices of the dilapidated structure, but its voice was one of the voices of the past, and she loitered as if its wail were companionable and musical.

A rat scurried across the attic.

Who was that? She listened and smiled. It was the children of a quarter of a century ago into some mischief. Opening the stair door, she crept gently up, that same motherly, inquiring smile softening her face.

Reaching the top of the stairs, she looked around with a wide-eyed dismay and disappointment.

The windows at either end of the garret admitted only sufficient light to make the gloom suggestive of emptiness and desolation.

She glanced at the candle. What did it mean? What did she want of a candle? The growing darkness aided her confused faculties, and she fumbled in her pocket for a match.

Her thought again diverted, she began to wander hither and thither, the light flickering in her uncertain hand and guttering as the wind waved it down upon the wick.

Under the eaves was a row of brass-studded hair-trunks. The leather was peeling off in patches. Their tops shone with bald spots where the moths had eaten away the hair. She went over to them and peered down, holding the light high to see better.

Bunches of dusty herbs hung forgotten and useless from the rafters. Shingles split with age showed edges sagging and broken from the neglect of years. The flame tasted the herbs. It licked the splintered shingles, the wind coaxing it through to the shrivelled, thirsty mosses clenching the bent, wavering roof.

She tried to raise the lids, but the trunks were locked. The baffled, lonely spirit tottered away to the loom whose interior had once been Susanna's bed.

"Are you here, Susanna? It's grandma."

She set her candle on the floor, stretching forth her

hands to feel the little form nestling under the old quilt spread over the unused frame.

The candle, eager to continue its work, blew against one of the inflammable, seasoned beams of the loom, sending out a runner of flame underneath.

She turned away from the deserted bed, the candle forgotten, and walked bewildered and disappointed toward the stairs.

There was a brightness everywhere now. It was morning. It was sunrise. She must have overslept! She quickened her step. How the chimney smoked! and there was no one to sweep it down. No one! no hands but hers! and how heavy they felt.

She went down the stairs, supporting herself against the sides with either hand.

What hurt her eyes? She could hardly see. There was such a grayness everywhere, and a moment before it had been so light. She could just perceive her chair. She must sit down and rest a minute; breakfast would be late, but she could not help it. Her feet felt heavy, too,—she must be getting old.

Meanwhile, the family lingered over the supper table, the children allowed the freedom of a last meal with their father before his return to the city. But, the shadows beginning to steal in and Janey rubbing her eyes, Celinda carried her off and the happy party broke up.

Catherwood and his wife went to the great porch facing towards the east and walked up and down. In the fullness of their mutual love and trust, they were silent, each, however, serious with a separate anxiety, intensified by the quiet hour and the sighing moan of the wind as it died away only to gather new volume in the gorge through which the creek ran. She thought of his future, and he of the time already near when another little life would be added to their circle.

A strange glare shot across the lawn and vanished. The wind brought a whiff of smoke, the air grew suddenly acrid.

They looked at each other, startled.

"Stay where you are!" He laid his hand imperatively on her arm and disappeared. But his wife, after a brief moment in which she gathered up her nerves, compelling them to obedience, followed.

What she saw did not arouse her fear, but it touched her sentiment to the quick.

A fan of flame towering from the roof of the old homestead was waving alluringly to the turnpike like an invitation to some departing traveller. It gathered volume and fury and splendor, but the wind, like a protecting angel, swept it away from the new home.

She lingered, thrilled with the grandeur of the spectacle and a profound poetic relief that the ever-recurring problem of what to do with the empty weather-beaten gray house had found its own solution. Then, her solicitude awakening for Mrs. Dutton and her children, she went in search of them.

When her husband left her, the first person he ran against was Celinda.

"Mis' Dutton! She ain't in her room! O my Lawd, my Lawd!"

"She is over there," he exclaimed with sudden conviction, rushing away.

He went to the lower door as nearer. The rooms were gray and suffocating, but they were empty. He staggered to the staircase. It was a well of smoke. Thin flames, like adders' tongues, were darting through from the upper stairs, but he struggled forward, burnt and choking, into the parlor.

The open windows, the wide-open door, the wind blowing the flames already breaking through the ceiling hither and thither, but clearing away the smoke also, enabled him to see sufficiently to take in the situation.

As if saving her for its last prey, the fire crept towards the aged dreamer and retreated, only to crawl nearer. Red and yellow and blue jets threaded the side walls, sending down long streamers and drawing them back with a feline, horrible playfulness in whose delay there seemed an extremity of treacherous cruelty.

But the old lady sat still, her head thrown wearily back, her thin hands lying relaxed and open in her lap, her eyes closed, a look of pathetic care and helplessness arrested forever on the pinched white face.

Gathering her in his arms, Catherwood tottered into the air, just as Celinda came rushing towards the door. She held forth her hands imploringly for his burden, but refusing to relinquish it, he pressed forward.

As they approached the house, Susanna met them, very pale, her eyes shining like stars. Janey, too, had escaped from her nurse and came tripping barefoot over the lawn, her little white gown trailing on the grass. No one spoke a word, Celinda's moans alone emphasizing the catastrophe.

The fire burned on, unmolested in its work of destruction. Some of the trees caught, flaring in the twilight like gigantic funeral torches. But the traveller to whom the flames had beckoned did not return. Her aged feet had shaken off the dust of the toilsome highway of life. She had escaped from bondage as though by fire, but, like the prophet in his chariot, had remained unscathed.

The old homestead burned to the ground, and the added life and bustle attendant on removing the débris, tearing down the cellars, levelling the soil and making the point of land between the two roads a portion of the lawn encompassing the cottage, was not unwelcome to the household.

Susanna's smile, if less radiant, was gentler. She kept her children with her constantly. She had a strange new feeling that she could not have anticipated, as of a soldier advanced to the front. Her grief was more abiding than poignant, nature having endowed her with that peculiar form of vitality which, though rendering some hard-hearted and callous, gave her the sanguine outlook on immortality. She never wavered in her belief that she should see and know her grandmother in some blessed, tender relation perpetuating the tie which had united them here. But she felt, day and night, the homesick longing for a presence removed from her ken for an indefinite period, and there was a warmth and demonstration towards those who were left which added charm to a character inclining to austerity.

Under such circumstances and conditions, her third child was born. With him came another hope, another ambition, and the present clothed itself in vivid reality once more. When Catherwood became convinced that the new boy gave every promise of being a big fellow with abundant vitality and energy, he made a request of his wife that surprised her very much. He wanted the child named Hillerton.

"Why?" she asked, with spirit and some show of indignation.

He rubbed his chin, as if he did not find it particularly easy to explain. Finally he said, with that shamefacedness which seems to beset men when confessing to unusual feeling: "I have a peculiar regard for Hillerton. I love him — and he loves me. I do not believe anything I could do would please him so much as to name one of my sons for him."

She picked her boy up, and looking into his full determined eyes asked: "Would you like to have such a long ugly name as Hillerton? Wouldn't you rather be Adoniram or Abijah or Jonathan? Yes, yes, I knew you would. The baby says, Louis, he would rather be called Moses than Hillerton. You can fancy his repugnance, therefore, to the name you have selected."

Catherwood laughed and said no more, but Susanna fell into a revery which seemed to cause her considerable perplexity, for her brow wrinkled and her cheek flushed.

When her husband left the room, she sat down and wrote a letter to Hillerton, repenting it the next day and full of a discomfort rare to her, as she seldom acted on an impulse.

A week elapsed before she received the reply, which came one rainy morning, while she was busy overseeing preparations for a return to the city. To feel sure of solitude, she stole away with it to a room already closed. Throwing open a shutter, she stood irresolute before the window, the dreary outlook affecting her with a growing dread and chagrin.

A cold, misty rain beaded the frost-bitten grass. The naked trees looked drenched and motionless. The chill November grayness brought back her recent loss with sudden poignancy. Brushing away a tear and mastering her reluctance, she began to read: —

"DEAR MRS. CATHERWOOD: I take it very kindly that you have written concerning your husband's desire to name his second boy after me, and I am sure he will be able to remove the compunction you say you felt in making an announcement, the pleasure of which he might have desired to reserve for himself. I have never had a moment's doubt of Catherwood's regard for me, even

during the trying circumstances through which the church has been passing recently, recognizing him, long ago, as the friend who sticketh closer than a brother. I need hardly add that my regard for him is as profound and steadfast as his for me. But however deep our mutual esteem may be, it may be warmed by some tangible evidence, and of such evidence I am the honored recipient. I can think of nothing to make me either prouder or happier than the fact that my friend's son will bear my name."

She looked off through the mist. Her face was set and proud. "Nothing could soften this man's tenacious, obstinate nature. He ignored her altogether. As if the boy were not her son, too! She resumed her reading.

"I have taken the liberty of leaving an order at Tiffany's for a gift for my namesake." A streak of color shot up into her cheek, the mention of a present under the circumstances vexing and embarrassing her. "It ought to reach you before the twentieth instant, the date you have fixed for your departure."

She turned over the page, and her pride melted.

"I feel all broken up that you, too, want to call your boy Hillerton. I turned myself out of a flower garden several years ago, because I was not allowed to pick its one perfect rose. I would undo my selfishness and foolishness, if I could. Let my namesake be the excuse for me to return to my old footing of intimacy as your friend in the same frank, loyal sense that I am Catherwood's.

"Yours sincerely,

"CYRUS HILLERTON."

She folded the letter with a glad, sweet feeling of relief. The past was slipping away so rapidly. She must hold on to the present. How glad she felt that she had written! She knew now that the constraint and formality and coldness of the first part of the letter were the measure of the effort the last part had cost. His concession was absolute, and she appreciated it for its full value.

During the evening, while sitting with her husband over an apple-wood fire, Celinda interrupted their conversation by coming in with a heavy box.

"What's that—books?" he exclaimed. "I ordered them sent to the city house."

"Dey'se de heaviest books I ever see!"

"Bring a hammer and chisel."

He pried off the top, Susanna standing by with a look of amused expectation.

Numerous packages wrapped in tissue paper, the crevices between them well stuffed to prevent friction, became visible. The minister undid them one by one, proceeding to open various cases with great deliberation. A silver bowl and plate, gold-lined, showed their faces. "Something for our boy, I see. Why!" holding up the plate so that the light struck it, "what's this! 'Hillerton Catherwood'!"

"Baby's name, isn't it?" she inquired ingenuously. "I gave him the choice, when you left the room, between Ebenezer and Hillerton, and after a great ado, he chose Hillerton."

"He was a good fellow and showed a wise mother's training. Are these things your extravagance?"

She shook her head. "I presume they are due to the patentee of the original title," and, with a sudden choke in her voice, she told of the letter. "He is my friend, too, again, at last."

"Whatever happens in the future," said Catherwood, "I feel sure Hillerton will stick to the friendship which has been a very real and beautiful thing to us both—as I intend to do. There is not a man in a thousand, darling, in whom the beast doesn't get uppermost, when his passion is thwarted. Hillerton has had an awful fight with himself over you, and now he has conquered. I can assure you that it has been long and hard enough for me to pity him from the very bottom of my soul. But he will see you henceforth as the mother of our boy, named after him."

"A man has no more right to be a beast than a woman has, Louis. I can't excuse Hillerton on that plea. But I like him. Perhaps, if I had not known you, I might have married him. How dreadful it would have been, in the light of what our life together is!" Her expression took on a look of spiritual elevation. She pressed his hand.

He gazed at her tenderly, and, as he did so, his face

became luminous. He had been waiting several days to tell her something, restraining himself, because he feared she had not regained her usual strength. But the time seemed fitting, and perhaps it was better for her to learn what he had to say before she was back in the press and stir of city life,—so little had he conjectured the solicitude with which she had watched him during the past six months.

"I have arrived at a decision, beloved, after playing with my convictions. You did not surmise, did you, that during the solitude of the summer, alone there in our house in New York, I was subjected to the great temptation of my life. The temptation is past. I know my duty and I intend to do it.

"The Calvin Memorial called a man with different views of church government, different convictions, different methods of preaching, a different faith than I have at present, and if I continue to use its pulpit and to take its money, what better am I than a thief and a traitor!

"The times and seasons will have to decide me in presenting my case before our session and people,"—his voice saddened,— "and my resignation to the Presbytery. I would like to do it as soon after the holidays as possible. Meanwhile, concerning doctrinal matter wherein I do not agree with the old-time Calvinism, I shall keep silent."

He looked at her a little anxiously, a little apologetically. "I am sorry, Susanna, very sorry, that you must suffer with me."

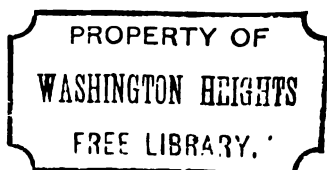
"I shall not suffer. I rejoice already." She drew a deep sigh of relief. Her face emanated joy, radiance, pride.

Throwing her arms around his neck, she kissed him, and then, with her hands on his shoulders, stood off a little way, gazing at him with fearlessness, dignity, and solemnity contagious and grand.

"Thank God, Louis, that you are an honest man; honest with your own soul! The nineteenth century needs prophets for the twentieth. You have been tried and not found wanting. It was so hard to keep silent, dear, while you were still in the dark. But I knew it was best for you, as it is for us all, in the supreme crisis of life, to

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fight the battle alone. I believed you would conquer. I saw your struggle; I saw it from the beginning. It made my other anxieties and cares, even my sorrow, insignificant, in comparison. But I knew, I knew you would come forth into the light."



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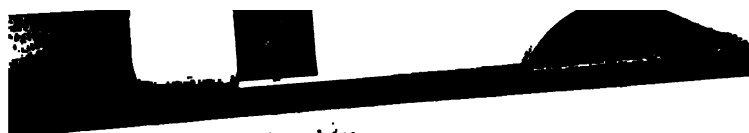






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